

## An Litir Bheag

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

An Litir Bheag is a shortened and simplified version of Ruairidh's Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh (also available on the BBC website), designed for those who are at an earlier stage of learning Gaelic. The topic each week is the same as Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh so that, once the Litir Bheag is mastered, a student of the language might wish to try the full Litir. This is Litir Bheag 577 (which corresponds to Litir 881). Ruairidh can be contacted at [rodny.macleam@bbc.co.uk](mailto:rodny.macleam@bbc.co.uk).

*Have you heard about the Gaelic bard Uilleam Ruighe 'n Uidhe? William Gow in English. He belonged to Rynuie in Strathspey. He was a poet and a hunter.*

*I'm going to read passages from a poem that William wrote about hunting the red deer in the Cairngorms. Here is the first verse:*

*Och, it's me that's sad  
On the mountain by myself,  
Staying in a wee pen  
Of a bothy I built for my  
needs;  
I didn't have a spade or axe,  
Or a tool around to hand  
Except the strong, fine-  
pointed dirk  
It's with her I cut the turf.*

*In the second verse, William names the 'Ban-Ghranndach' – the 'Grant maiden'. He means his gun. It was a practice of the old Gaels to give their gun a feminine name. Gunpowder was useful for lighting q fire. And it was cold up on the hill:*

*The hose have frozen on me,*

An cuala sibh mun bhàrd Ghàidhlig Uilleam Ruighe 'n Uidhe? William Gow ann am Beurla. Bha e beò aig deireadh an ochdamh linn deug. Bhuineadh e do Ruighe 'n Uidhe ann an Srath Spè. Bha e na bhàrd agus na shealgair.

Tha mi a' dol a leughadh pìosan à dàn a sgrìobh Uilleam mu dheidhinn sealg nam fiadh anns a' Mhonadh Ruadh. Seo a' chiad rann:

*Och, gur mi tha muladach  
Sa mhonadh, 's mi leam fhèin,  
'S mi bhi 'tàmh an cròdhan beag  
Bothain 'thog mi 'm fheum;*

*Cha robh spaid no tuagh agam,  
No ball mun cuairt dom làimh,  
Ach a' bhiodag làidir bharrach-  
chaol  
'S ann leatha bhuaib mi 'm fàl.*

Anns an dàrna rann, tha Uilleam ag ainmeachadh 'a' Bhan-Ghranndach' – 'the Grant maiden'. Tha e a' ciallachadh a ghumna. 'S e an cleachdadh a bha aig na Gàidheil o shean a bhith a' cur ainm boireann air gunna. Bha pùdar – no fùdar – a' ghumna feumail airson teine a chur thuige. Agus bha i gu math fuar sa mhonadh:

*Tha na h-osanan air reothadh*

*Before the wee smoke goes  
up,  
The wind and snow and  
blizzard,  
Assail me about the ear;  
But I'll grasp this Grant  
maiden,  
Which I have hold of,  
And the fire will be kindled  
for me with gritty, hard  
powder.*

*Now, we know from another  
poem – Allt an Lochain Uaine – that  
William built a bothy next to that  
burn. That is in the upper end of  
Glen Derry. He names other places  
up there in his poetry. For example,  
the Glas-allt and the Dubh-ghleann.*

*William was poaching on land  
that belonged to Lord Fife. He was  
there so often that he had a bottle of  
whisky 'under a wisp of grass at the  
bottom of a slope'. He would raise a  
toast to the stag and the landlord.  
Here is the final verse:*

*When I sit at ease,  
Without reporting a  
misfortune,  
I'll get hold of a bottle  
That's under a whisp at the  
base of a slope;  
If the companions happen  
To be near to me at the time,  
"Lord Fife and the antlered  
stag" –  
The toast that goes around.*

*orm,  
Mun tèid a' cheòthag suas,  
Tha gaoth is cur is cathadh ann,*

*'S e gabhail domh sa chluais;  
Ach glacaidh mis' Bhan-  
Ghranndach seo,  
A tha nam làimh san uair,  
Is fadaidh is' an teine dhomh,  
Le fùdar sgeireach cruaidh.*

*Nise, tha fios againn bho dhàn eile  
– 'Allt an Lochain Uaine' – gun do thog  
Uilleam bothan ri taobh an uillt sin. Tha  
sin ann an ceann shuas Gleann Doire.  
Tha e ag ainmeachadh àiteachan eile  
shuas an sin anns a' bhàrdachd aige. Mar  
eisimpleir, an Glas-allt agus an Dubh-  
ghleann.*

*Bha Uilleam a' poidseadh air  
fearann a bhuineadh do Lord Fife. Bha e  
ann cho tric, 's gun robh botal de  
dh'uisge-beatha aige 'fo shop aig bun  
bruthaich'. Bhiodh e a' gabhail deoch-  
slàinte don damh agus don uachdaran.  
Seo an rann mu dheireadh:*

*'S nuair shuidheas mi air socair,  
'S gun dosgainn bhith ri luaidh,*

*Bheir mi làmh air botal  
Tha fon t-sop am bun na  
bruthaich;*

*'S ma thachras do na companaich  
Bhith làimh rium anns an uair,  
"Lord Fife is damh na cròice" –*

*An deoch-slàinte thèid mun cuairt.*