

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 604 (which corresponds to Litir 908). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodgy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I was in Kingussie in the autumn. I saw a sign on a building. It was advertising a cemetery behind the houses. Dòmhnall Phàil is buried there.

Even to Gaels who don't belong to Badenoch – like me – we know the man as 'Dòmhnall Phàil'. Donald Campbell was his official name. He is known as 'The Kingussie Bard'. And he is famous throughout the Highlands as the author of the song 'Guma Slàn do na Fearaibh'. Here are the first two verses for you.

A health to the men, who'll go over the ocean, to the land of promise, where they won't feel cold, a health to the men, who'll go over the ocean.

A health to the wives, a complaint will not be heard, they'll go heartily, following us over the ocean, a health to the men, who'll go over the ocean.

The bard is farewelling those who are leaving Badenoch. They are going over the ocean to Sydney in Australia.

Thomas Sinton tells us about the song in his book The Poetry of Badenoch. It goes back to the year

Bha mi ann an Ceann a' Ghiùthsaidh as t-fhoghar. Chunnaic mi sanas air togalach. Bha e a' sanasachd cladh air cùl nan taighean. Tha Dòmhnall Phàil air a thiodhlacadh ann.

Eadhon do Ghàidheil nach buin do Bhàideanach – mar mi fhìn – tha sinn eòlach air an duine mar 'Dòmhnall Phàil'. 'S e Dòmhnall Caimbeul a bha air mar ainm oifigeil. Tha e aithnichte mar 'Bhàrd Cheann a' Ghiùthsaidh'. Agus tha e ainmeil air feadh na Gàidhealtachd mar ùghdar an òrain 'Guma slàn do na Fearaibh'. Seo a' chiad dà rann dhuibh.

Guma slàn do na fearaibh, Thèid thairis a' chuain, Gu talamh a' gheallaidh, Far nach fhairich iad fuachd, Guma slàn do na fearaibh, Thèid thairis a' chuain.

Guma slàn do na mnathan, Nach cluinnear an gearan, 'S ann thèid iad gu smearail, Gar leantainn thar 'chuain. Guma slàn do na fearaibh, Thèid thairis a' chuain.

Tha am bàrd a' leigeil soraidh le feadhainn a tha a' fàgail Bhàideanach. Tha iad a' falbh thar a' chuain gu ruige Sydney ann an Astràilia.

Tha Tòmas Sinton ag innse dhuinn mun òran anns an leabhar aige *The Poetry of Badenoch*. Tha e a' dol air ais don

1838. Many left Kingussie for Oban. The vessel, St George, was waiting for them there.

There were a lot of people in Kingussie the day they left. The emigrants were leaving and many people were there for Columba's feast day. Sinton tells us that the host went to the summit of the Creag Bheag, the hill above the village. There were musicians among them. The tears were flowing, with people leaving the land of their upbringing and their close relatives. Dòmhnall Phàil was expecting to follow them, but he didn't.

We'll take a further look at the man next week. But to finish the Litir, here is another verse from the song Guma Slàn do na Fearaibh:

We'll get bread and butter there, we'll get sugar and tea there, we will not suffer want, in the land of plenty, a health to the men, who'll go over the ocean.

bhliadhna ochd ceud deug, trithead 's a h-ochd (1838). Dh'fhalbh mòran à Ceann a' Ghiùthsaidh gu ruige an t-Òban. Bha an soitheach, St George, a' feitheamh riutha an sin.

Bha sluagh mòr ann an Ceann a' Ghiùthsaidh an latha a dh'fhalbh iad. Bha na h-eilthreach a' falbh agus bha mòran ann airson Fèill Chaluim Chille. Tha Sinton ag innse dhuinn gun deach an sluagh gu mullach na Creige Bige, an cnoc os cionn a' bhaile. Bha luchd-ciùil nam measg. Bha na deòir a' ruith, agus daoine a' fàgail dùthaich an àraich agus an dlùth-chàirdean. Bha Dòmhnall Phàil fhèin an dùil leantainn orra, ach cha do lean.

Bheir sinn sùil a bharrachd air an duine an-ath-sheachdain. Ach, airson crìoch a chur air an Litir, seo agaibh rann eile bhon òran *Guma Slàn do na Fearaibh*:

Gheibh sinn aran is ìm ann, Gheibh sinn siùcar is tì ann, 'S cha bhi gainne oirnn fhìn, San tìr sa bheil buaidh, Guma slàn do na fearaibh, Thèid thairis a' chuain.