

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 689 (which corresponds to Litir 993). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

Last week I reported on Fearchar a' Ghunna. He was born in Strathconon in Ross-shire. He was raised on a croft and he had no school education. But he was an expert on hunting and smuggling. He was good at them!

He was a small man, with long hair. A farmer thumped him in the head with a spade when he was young. Farquhar had a mental weakness from that day on.

Strathconon was famous for illegal whisky distilling and for whisky smuggling. The government sent a squad of excise officers to the strath. But, one night, their house was burned to the ground. Farquhar came under suspicion. He was questioned, but he didn't admit anything. Shortly after that, a brother of his was killed in an altercation with government officers. Since then Farquhar had hard side he didn't have before.

At the age of twenty-five, Farquhar left Strathconon. He started a new life as a wanderer. He would go between the Black Isle and the area around the Beaulieu Firth, close to Inverness. The local

An t-seachdain sa chaidh rinn mi aithris air Fearchar a' Ghunna. Rugadh e ann an Srath Chonain ann an Siorrachd Rois. Thogadh e air croit agus cha robh foghlam sgoile aige. Ach bha sgoil aige ann an sealg agus cùiltearachd. Bha e math orra sin!

'S e fear beag a bha ann, le falt fada. Thug tuathanach sgleog dha na cheann le spaid nuair a bha e òg. Bha laigse inntinn aig Fearchar bhon latha sin a-mach.

Bha Srath Chonain ainmeil airson obair na poite-duibhe agus airson cùiltearachd uisge-bheatha. Chuir an riaghaltas sguad de dh'oifigearan cìs-bhathair chun an t-sratha. Ach, oidhche a bha seo, chaidh an taigh aca a losgadh gu làr. Thàinig Fearchar fo amharas. Chaidh a cheasnachadh, ach cha do dh'aidich e càil. Goirid an dèidh sin, chaidh bràthair aige a mharbhadh ann an còmhstri le oifigearan riaghaltais. Bhon uair sin, bha taobh cruaidh aig Fearchar nach robh aige roimhe.

Aig aois còig air fhichead, chuir Fearchar a chùil ri Srath Chonain. Thòisich e beatha ùr mar fhalbhanach. Bhiodh e a' dol eadar an t-Eilean Dubh agus sgìre Poll an Ròid, faisg air Inbhir Nis. Bha muinntir an àite measail air.

people were fond of him. They made certain that he would have food and tobacco.

It was easy to recognise Farquhar. His clothing was multicoloured. There were chains, bones and feathers over him. He had a big gun, that he was carrying with him. It had six barrels. It was big and heavy. But I don't reckon it was effective!

Farquhar had a difficult relationship with church figures. He was living in a bothy connected to the manse at Redcastle on the Black Isle. The minister, Mr MacRae, had returned there from America. One day, Mr MacRae stuck his head through the door of Farquhar's bothy. 'You smell terrible, Farquhar,' he said.

'They tell me,' replied Farquhar, 'that the deer have great nostrils, but that you had particularly good nostrils when you got the smell of the Redcastle stipend in America.' Fearchar a' Ghunna had a sharp tongue!

Rinn iad cinnteach gun robh biadh is tombaca aige.

Bha e furasta Fearchar aithneachadh. Bha a chuid aodaich ioma-dhathach. Bha slabhraidhean, cnàmhan is itean thairis air. Bha gunna mòr aige, a bha e a' giùlan leis. Bha sia baraillean air. Bha e mòr agus trom. Ach cha chreid mi gun robh e èifeachdach!

Bha càirdeas doirbh aig Fearchar le pearsaichean eaglais. Bha e a' fuireach ann am bothan ceangailte ris a' mhansa anns a' Chaisteal Ruadh san Eilean Dubh. Bha am Ministear, Mgr MacRath, air tilleadh ann bho Ameireagaidh. Latha a bha seo, chuir Mgr MacRath a cheann a-steach air doras bothan Fhearchair. 'S ann agad a tha am fàileadh, Fhearchair,' thuirt e.

'Tha iad ag innse dhòmhsa,' fhreagair Fearchar, 'gu bheil cuinneanan glan aig na fèidh, ach 's ann agads' a bha na cuinneanan glan nuair a fhuair thu fàileadh stìpean a' Chaisteil Ruaidh ann an Ameireagaidh.' Bha teanga bhiorach aig Fearchar a' Ghunna!