

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 708 (which corresponds to Litir 1,012). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.macleon@bbc.co.uk.

When I was in Lismore in the autumn, I went to look at the site of the house in which Alexander Carmichael was raised. He was renowned for writing Carmina Gadelica. He was raised in Croit an Lochain near Loch Baile a' Ghobhainn. He was the youngest of nine children.

When he left Lismore, he got work as an exciseman. He was based in Greenock, Dublin, Islay and Skye. He started to collect oral tradition under the auspices of John Francis Campbell of Islay.

He was in Cornwall for two years. In 1864 he returned to Scotland. He was initially based in Lochmaddy. He started to make a collection of oral tradition in Uist.

Carmichael married Mary Frances MacBean in 1868. They were living in Creagorry in Benbecula. After a while, he started to write for the radical newspaper, The Highlander.

Nuair a bha mi ann an Lios Mòr as fhoghar, chaidh mi a choimhead air làrach an taighe anns an do thogadh Alasdair MacIlleMhìcheil. Bha esan cliùmhòr airson *Carmina Gadelica* a sgrìobhadh. Thogadh e ann an Croit an Lochain faisg air Loch Baile a' Ghobhainn. B' e an leanabh a b' òige de naoinear cloinne.

Nuair a dh'fhàg e Lios Mòr, fhuair e obair mar ghàidsear. Bha e stèidhichte ann an Grianraig, Baile Atha Cliath, Ìle agus san Eilean Sgitheanach. Thòisich e air beul-aithris a chruinneachadh fo sgèith Iain Òg Ìle.

Bha e anns a' Chòrn airson dà bhliadhna. Ann an ochd ceud deug, seasgad 's a ceithir (1864) thill e a dh'Alba. Bha e stèidhichte an toiseach ann an Loch nam Madadh. Thòisich e air cruinneachadh a dhèanamh de bheul-aithris ann an Uibhist.

Phòs MacIlleMhìcheil Màiri Frangag NicBheathain ann an ochd ceud deug, seasgad 's a h-ochd (1868). Bha iad a' fuireach ann an Creag Ghoraidh ann am Beinn a' Bhaoghla. An ceann greis, thòisich e air sgrìobhadh airson a' phàipeir-naidheachd radaigich, *The Highlander*.

After they had been in the islands, they went to live in Edinburgh. The first two books of Carmina Gadelica were brought out in the year 1900.

There is a question over whether Alasdair embellished what he gathered. But Carmina Gadelica is very important as a display of the voice of the old Gaels.

His daughter Ella married the Gaelic scholar, William J Watson. She brought out a new edition of the first two books in 1928. That was six years after her father's death. Her son, James Carmichael Watson, who was also a Gaelic scholar, brought out the third and fourth books at the start of the Second War.

James was in Lismore before the war. He was surprised that not everybody was keen on Alexander. Even today, some natives of Lismore are not keen on him. As the exceptional Lismore man, the late Donald Black, wrote in his book 'A Tale or Two from Lismore' – 'A prophet was always without honour in his own land.'

An dèidh dhaibh a bhith anns na h-eileanan, chaidh iad a dh'fhuireach ann an Dùn Èideann. Thugadh a' chiad dà leabhar de Charmina Gadelica a-mach anns a' bhliadhna naoi ceud deug (1900).

Tha ceist ann mu co-dhiù chuir Alasdair gleans air na chruinnich e. Ach tha Carmina Gadelica gu math cudromach mar thaisbeanadh de ghuth nan seann Ghàidheal.

Phòs a nighean Ella an sgoilear Gàidhlig Uilleam MacBhàtair. Thug ise eagraan ùr dhen chiad dà leabhar a-mach ann an naoi ceud deug, fichead 's a h-ochd (1928). Bha sin sia bliadhna deug an dèidh bàs a h-athar. Thug a mac-se, Seumas MacIlleMhìcheil MacBhàtair, a bha cuideachd na sgoilear Gàidhlig, an treas is ceathramh leabhar a-mach aig toiseach an Dàrna Cogaidh.

Bha Seumas ann an Lios Mòr ron chogadh. Chuir e iongnadh air nach robh a h-uile duine measail air Alasdair. Eadhon an-diugh, chan eil cuid de Liosaich uabhasach bàidheil ris. Mar a sgrìobh an sàr-Liosach, Dòmhnall MacIlleDhuibh nach maireann, anns an leabhar aige 'Sgeul no Dhà às an Lios' – 'Bha fàidh riamh gun urram na dhùthaich fhèin.'