

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 786 (which corresponds to Litir 1,090). Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

Last week, I started the Litir with a passage from the Bible: Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed. My account was about the murder of Donald son of William in the parish of Kirkhill (Wardlaw). The murderer, John son of Big John, and his brother-in-law John Mackenzie, left Donald's body on the shore.

A shepherd found the body. It was transferred to the church in Kirkhill. The sheriff, Alexander Chisholm, requested that every adult in the area go to the church.

Donald's body was naked and on a plank. When the sheriff read out each person's name, he or she had to come forward and put their hand on Donald's breast. The sheriff was hoping to recognise the murderer.

Came the turn of John son of Big John. He put his hand on the lad's breast, and something strange happened. A wound opened and blood came out of it. John was asked to put his hand on the body again. This time, blood came from the body's nose.

The sheriff was of the opinion that John was guilty. But John refused to admit that. And John Mackenzie did not appear. He had fled.

An t-seachdain sa chaidh, thòisich mi an Litir le earrann às a' Bhìoball: *Ge b' e a dhòirteas fuil duine, le duine dòirtear fhuil-san.* Bha an cunntas agam mu mhurt Dhòmhnail mhic Uilleim ann an sgìre Chnoc Mhoire. Dh'fhàg am murtair, Iain mac 'an Mhòir, agus a bhràthair-chèile, Iain MacCoinnich, corp Dhòmhnail air a' chladach.

Lorg cìobair an corp. Chaidh a chur don eaglais ann an Cnoc Mhoire. Dh'iarr an siorram, Alasdair Siosalach, air a h-uile inbheach anns an sgìre dhol don eaglais.

Bha corp Dhòmhnail rùisgte, air dèile. Nuair a leugh an siorram ainm gach duine, bha aige no aice ri tighinn air adhart, agus làmh a chur air broilleach Dhòmhnail. Bha an siorram an dòchas am murtair aithneachadh.

Thàinig turas Iain mhic 'an Mhòir. Chuir e a làmh air broilleach a' ghille, agus thachair rudeigin annasach. Dh'fhosgail lot, agus thàinig fuil às. Chaidh iarraidh air Iain a làmh a chur air a' chorp a-rithist. An turas seo, thàinig fuil à sròn a' chuirp.

Bha an siorram dhen bheachd gun robh Iain ciontach. Ach dhiùlt Iain sin aideachadh. Agus cha do nochd Iain MacCoinnich. Bha esan air teicheadh.

For a fortnight, John son of Big John was in the 'cip' in Inverness – that's a thing called 'the stocks' in English. He was cold and wet, and his two feet fell off. He was taken home to Fingask. Little by little, he became stronger. But he wasn't able to do work. He was a beggar.

However, John Mackenzie was found. He was living in Keith. He was arrested. When he saw the old Church of Inverness, he admitted his guilt. And he named John son of Big John as the murderer.

The two Johns were put in front of a judge. The judge found them guilty. Their heads were cut off.

The account was made by a churchman. At the end, he wrote: 'Thus was God's law exerted – Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.'

Airson ceala-deug, bha Iain mac 'an Mhòir anns a' chip ann an Inbhir Nis – sin rud ris an canar 'the stocks' ann am Beurla. Bha e fliuch is fuar, agus thuit a dhà chois dheth. Chaidh a thoirt dhachaigh gu Fionn Ghasg. Mean air mhean, dh'fhàs e na bu làidire. Ach cha robh e comasach air obair a dhèanamh. Bha e na dhèirceach.

Ge-tà, chaidh Iain MacCoinnich a lorg. Bha e a' fuireach ann am Baile Chè. Chaidh a chur an grèim. Nuair a chunnaic e seann Eaglais Inbhir Nis, dh'aidich e a chiont. Agus dh'ainmich e Iain mac 'an Mhòir mar mhurtair.

Chaidh an dà Iain a chur air beulaibh briteamh. Fhuair am briteamh ciontach iad. Bha an cinn air an gearradh dhiubh.

Bha an cunntas air a dhèanamh le pears-eaglais. Aig an deireadh, sgrìobh e: 'S ann mar sin a bha lagh Dhè air a chur an gnìomh – Ge b' e a dhòirteas fuil duine, le duine dòirtear fhuil-san.'