

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 792 (which corresponds to Litir 1,096). Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I was telling you about Robert Armstrong from Perthshire. He put together a Gaelic dictionary early in the 19th century. He was raised in Kenmore at the eastern end of Loch Tay. Robert went to university. He was initially in Edinburgh, and then in St Andrews. He came out as a scholar of Ancient Greek and Latin.

He was ready to be a minister. Instead of that, however, he left for London. He wanted to set up a school in which he would educate the sons of gentlemen.

For more than twenty years, he ran the South Lambeth Grammar School. Armstrong was very successful as a teacher and schoolmaster.

He heard that Comunn Gàidhealach na h-Alba – The Highland Society of Scotland – were intending to compile a Gaelic dictionary. They had hired three scholars. But Robert reckoned he could create a dictionary just as well as them.

He was busy with his daily work. He didn't have much time to compile a dictionary. Despite that, he made good progress. However, when he had gone

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh mu Raibeart Armstrong à Siorrachd Pheairt. Chuir e faclair Gàidhlig ri chèile tràth anns an naoidheamh linn deug. Thogadh e anns a' Cheannmhor aig ceann an ear Loch Tatha. Chaidh Raibeart don oilthigh. Bha e an toiseach ann an Dùn Èideann, agus an uair sin ann an Cill Rìmhinn. Thàinig e a-mach mar sgoilear de Sheann Ghreugais agus Laidinn.

Bha e deiseil airson a bhith na mhinistear. An àite sin, ge-tà, dh'fhalbh e a Lunnainn. Bha e airson sgoil a chur air dòigh, anns am biodh e ag oideachadh mic dhaoin-uaisle.

Airson còrr is fichead bliadhna, bha e a' ruith an *South Lambeth Grammar School*. Bha Armstrong gu math soirbheachail mar neach-teagaisg agus maighstir-sgoile.

Chuala e gun robh Comunn Gàidhealach na h-Alba – *The Highland Society of Scotland* – am beachd faclair Gàidhlig a chur ri chèile. Bha iad air trìùir sgoilearan fhastadh. Ach bha Raibeart dhen beachd gun dèanadh esan faclair a cheart cho math riutha.

Bha e trang leis an obair làitheil aige. Cha robh cus ùine aige airson faclair a chur ri chèile. A dh'aindeoin sin, rinn e adhartas math. Ge-tà, nuair a bha e air a dhol cho

as far as the letter 'M', the publisher's building was burned to the ground. Robert had to start his work anew. That must have been very hard for him.

He was conscientious as a lexicographer. His dictionary was published in 1825. And how were the three scholars at the Highland Society of Scotland getting on? Oh dear ... there would be three more years until their dictionary appeared!

Armstrong's dictionary was well received, apparently. It was very substantial. It contained more than a thousand pages. There was a chapter in it about Gaelic grammar. And it was the first Gaelic dictionary that looked at etymology.

Armstrong was named Gaelic Lexicographer Royal to King George IV, to whom his book was dedicated. But, despite that, his life was not entirely on an even keel, as we'll see next week.

fada ris an litir 'M', chaidh togalach an fhoillsicheir a losgadh gu làr. B' fheudar do Raibeart an obair aige a thòiseachadh às ùr. Feumaidh gun robh sin gu math doirbh dha.

Bha e dìcheallach mar fhaclairiche. Chaidh am faclair aige fhoillseachadh ann an ochd ceud deug, fichead 's a còig (1825). Agus ciamar a bha dol don triùir sgoilearan aig Comunn Gàidhealach na h-Alba? Obh obh ... bha trì bliadhna eile gu bhith ann mus nochdadh am faclair acasan!

Bha fèill air faclair Armstrong, a rèir choltais. Bha e gu math tomadach. Bha còrr is mìle duilleag ann. Bha caibideil ann mu ghràmar na Gàidhlig. Agus b' e a' chiad fhaclair Gàidhlig a thug sùil air bunachas fhaclan.

Chaidh Armstrong ainmeachadh mar am Faclairiche Gàidhlig Rìoghail do Rìgh Seòras IV dhan robh an leabhar aige air ainmeachadh. Ach, a dh'aindeoin sin, cha robh cùisean buileach rèidh dha, mar a ch'inn an-ath-sheachain.