

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 821 (which corresponds to Litir 1,125). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I was telling you about the 'witch', Isobel Gowdie. She admitted that she was involved in witchcraft. She said there was a sexual relationship between the witches and the Devil.

The interrogators applied to the Privy Council in Edinburgh. They were of the opinion that they had enough evidence to convict Gowdie and another woman – Janet Breadhead – on charges of witchcraft.

It's thought that Gowdie was put to death, although that is not entirely clear. As I was telling you a fortnight ago, the locals point out a hill where she was, according to oral tradition, burned to death.

Some people are suspicious about Gowdie's accounts of shapeshifting, the Queen of the Fairies and the Devil. They say that they are like what the tradition bearers would say. Was Isobel just reporting material from stories?

Some others suspected that Gowdie was suffering from mental disease. Around Auldearn, there is an opinion that she was suffering from a disease called ergotism. People get it

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh mun 'bhana-bhuidsich' Iseabail Gowdie. Dh'aidich i gun robh i an sàs ann am buidseachd. Thuirt i gun robh càirdeas feiseil eadar na bana-bhuidseichean agus an Donas.

Chuir an luchd-ceasnachaidh tagradh don Chomhairle Dhìomhair ann an Dùn Èideann. Bha iad dhen bheachd gun robh fianais gu leòr aca airson Gowdie agus boireannach eile – Seònaid Breadhead – a dhìtheadh air casaidean de bhuidseachd.

Thathar a' smaoineachadh gun deach Gowdie a chur gu bàs, ged nach eil sin uile-gu-lèir soilleir. Mar a bha mi ag innse dhuibh o chionn ceala-deug, bidh muinntir an àite a' comharrachadh cnoc far an robh i, a rèir beul-aithris, air a losgadh gu bàs.

Tha cuid amharasach mu na cunntasan aig Gowdie de chruth-atharrachadh, Banrigh nan Sìthichean agus an Donas. Tha iad ag ràdh gu bheil iad coltach ris na chanadh na seanchaidhean. An robh Iseabail dìreach ag aithris stuth à sgeulachdan?

Tha cuid eile an amharas gun robh Gowdie a' fulang le tinneas inntinn. Timcheall Allt Èireann, tha beachd ann gun robh i a' fulang le tinneas air a bheil

by eating a fungus that grows on cereal plants.

Who knows what the truth is. Isobel Gowdie's account of her life as a 'witch' is pretty amazing, however.

Today, Isobel is famous. Four novels were written about her. The composer James Macmillan, wrote a musical piece for orchestra called 'The Confession of Isobel Gowdie'.

But, for two hundred years after her death, she was not famous. In 1833, however, her confessions were published in the book 'Ancient Criminal Trials in Scotland' by Robert Pitcairn.

That takes me back to Downie Hill, that was shown to me by a friend. That's a hill where Isobel met the fairies, according to oral tradition. Some people maintain that she is still seen and that her ghost is 'The Green Woman' that people around Auldearn see from time to time.

ergotism. Gheibh daoine e le bhith ag ithe fungas a tha a' fàs air lusan arbhair.

Cò aige tha fios dè an fhìrinn a tha ann. Tha an cunntas aig Iseabail Gowdie mu a beatha mar 'bhana-bhuidseach' gu math iongantach, ge-tà.

Anns an latha an-diugh, tha Iseabail ainmeil. Chaidh ceithir nobhailean a sgrìobhadh mu a deidhinn. Chruthaich an sgrìobhaiche-ciùil Seumas Mac a' Mhaoilein pìos-ciùil airson orcastra air a bheil 'The Confession of Isobel Gowdie'.

Ach, airson dà cheud bliadhna an dèidh a bàis, cha robh i ainmeil. Ann an ochd ceud deug, trithead 's a trì (1833), ge-tà, chaidh na h-aideachaidhean aice fhoillseachadh anns an leabhar 'Ancient Criminal Trials in Scotland' le Raibeart Pitcairn.

Tha sin gam thoirt air ais gu Downie Hill, a chaidh a shealltainn dhomh le caraid. 'S e sin cnoc far an do choinnich Iseabail ris na sìthichean, a rèir beul-aithris. Tha cuid a' cumail a-mach gum bithear ga faicinn fhathast agus gur e an taibhse aice 'Am Boireannach Uaine' a chì daoine timcheall Allt Èireann bho àm gu àm.