

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 858 (which corresponds to Litir 1,162). Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I was telling you about Uamh an Fhuamhaire or Church Cave on the Isle of Rona. Rona is a rough, rocky island. Before the nineteenth century, there was never big population living there.

Thus, when did the people need a church? Well, it was in the second half of the nineteenth century. A Scottish merchant, George Rainy, bought Raasay and Rona in 1843. Rainy was a slave owner in the Caribbean. He made a fortune. He got compensation money from the government when they banned slavery in the Empire. And it was after that that he bought Raasay and Rona.

Rainy has a bad reputation. He cleared up to a hundred families from fourteen townships in Raasay. In his poem, Screapadal, the famous poet, Sorley Maclean says:

Rainy, who cleared fourteen townships in the Island of the Big Men, Great Raasay of the MacLeods...

Among the townships that were cleared was Screapadal on the east side of the island. Some of the Screapadal folk went to Rona to live there as best they might. The

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh mu Uamh an Fhuamhaire no Church Cave ann an Eilean Rònaigh. Tha Rònaigh na eilean garbh, creagach. Ron naoidheamh linn deug, cha robh sluagh mòr riamh a' fuireach ann.

Mar sin, cuin a bha feum aig an t-sluagh air eaglais? Uill, bha anns an dàrna leth dhen naoidheamh linn deug. Cheannaich marsantach Albannach, Seòras Rèanaidh, Ratharsair agus Rònaigh ann an ochd ceud deug, ceathrad 's a trì (1843). Bha Rèanaidh a' cumail thràilleann anns a' Charibbean. Rinn e fortan. Fhuair e airgead-dìolaidh bhon riaghaltas nuair a chuir iad casg air tràilleachd anns an Ìmpireachd. Agus 's ann às dèidh sin a cheannaich e Ratharsair agus Rònaigh.

Tha droch chliù aig Rèanaidh. Dh'fhuadaich e suas ri ceud teaghlach à ceithir bailtean deug ann an Ratharsair. Anns an dàn aige, Sgreapadal, tha am bàrd ainmeil Somhairle MacGill-Eain ag ràdh:

Rèanaidh, a thog an tuath o cheithir bailtean deug ann an Eilean nam Fear Mòra, Ratharsair Mhòr nan Leòdach...

Am measg nam bailtean a chaidh fhuadachadh, bha Sgreapadal air taobh an ear an eilein. Chaidh feadhainn de mhuinntir Sgreapadail gu ruige Rònaigh airson a bhith beò an sin cho math 's a b'

population of Rona rose to 180 at the end of the 19th century. In the poem Sgreapadal, the poet names the cave as follows:

The giant's cave in Rona
and its small rows of stones,
seats of men and women and
children

listening to Maighstir Ruairi
telling that here is no abiding city
Rainy or no Rainy.

Maighstir Ruairi was the Rev. Roddy MacLeod, a grandson of the old landlord of Raasay. He was the first Free Church minister on Skye. He would often preach on Rona in the giant's cave.

A church was built where the people were living on Rona at the start of the twentieth century. But baptisms continued for a long time in the cave. No services are held there today. But I'm sure that some visitors pray there from time to time.

urrainn dhaibh. Dh'èirich an sluagh ann an Rònaigh gu naoi fichead aig deireadh an naoidheamh linn deug. Anns an dàn Sgreapadal, tha am bàrd ag ainmeachadh na h-uamha mar a leanas ...

Uamha 'n Fhuamhaire 'n Rònaigh agus a sreathan beaga chlach, suidheachain fhear is bhan is cloinne ag èisteachd ri Maighstir Ruairi ag innse nach eil an seo baile mhaireas, Rèanaidh ann no Rèanaidh às.

B' e Maighstir Ruairi An t-Urr. Ruairidh MacLeòid, ogha aig seann uachdaran Ratharsair. B' esan a' chiad mhinistear aig an Eaglais Shaoir anns an Eilean Sgitheanach. Bhiodh e gu tric a' searmonachadh ann an Rònaigh ann an Uamh an Fhuamhaire.

Thogadh eaglais far an robh na daoine a' fuireach ann an Rònaigh aig toiseach an fhicheadamh linn. Ach lean baistidhean airson ùine mhòr anns an uaimh. Chan eil seirbheisean gan cumail innte an-diugh. Ach tha fhios gum bi cuid de luchd-tadhail a' dèanamh ùrnaigh innte bho àm gu àm.