

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 864 (which corresponds to Litir 1,168). Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I want to conclude my accounts of Fearchar Lighiche. I'll look at oral tradition that Mary Beith collected among the people of the Mackay Country [N Sutherland].

The local people understood that Fearchar was a Beaton. The name of that clan did not last too long in the north, however. That was for two reasons. Some of Fearchar's descendants took the name Mackay. And some of them went to Easter Ross. They were physicians there for the Munros who owned Fowlis Estate.

The shennachies in Melness were saying that Fearchar set up a medical school. The school received funding from the coffers of a Scottish King. The school was teaching surgeons who would be part of the Scottish Army.

One of the old men was of the opinion that the school was west of Achiniver at the mouth of the Strath Melness Burn. There is no sign of it today.

Near there, south of Dalnafree, was a site where the students were living. And also close to Strath Melness Burn, there was a ruin that was recognised as 'Fearchar's

Tha mi airson crìoch a chur air na cunntasan agam mu Fhearchar Lighiche. Bheir mi sùil air beul-aithris a chruinnich Màiri Beith am measg muinntir Dùthaich MhicAoidh.

Bha muinntir an àite a' tuigsinn gur e Peutanach a bha ann am Fearchar. Cha do mhair ainm a' chinnidh sin ro fhada anns a' cheann a tuath, ge-tà. Bha sin air dà adhbhar. Ghabh cuid de shliochd Fhearchair an t-ainm Mac Aoidh orra fhèin. Agus dh'fhalbh feadhainn dhiubh gu Taobh Sear Rois. Bha iad nan lighichean an sin do na Rothaich leis an robh Oighreachd Foghlais.

Bha na seanchaidhean air Taobh Mhealanais ag ràdh gun do chuir Fearchar air dòigh sgoil mheidigeach. Fhuair an sgoil maoinachadh bhon sporan aig Rìgh Albannach. Bha an sgoil ag oideachadh lannsairean a bhiodh mar phàirt de dh'Arm na h-Alba.

Bha fear de na bodaich dhen bheachd gun robh an sgoil gu siar air Ach' an Inbhir aig beul Allt Srath Mhealanais. Chan eil sgeul oirre an-diugh.

Faisg air sin, deas air Dail na Frìthe, bha làrach far an robh na h-oileanaich a' fuireach. Agus cuideachd faisg air Allt Mhealanais, bha tobhta ann a bha aithnichte mar 'Làrach Taigh

House Site'. People reckoned that Fearchar Lighiche was living there. Nothing is left of the ruin today.

Are there place names in the Mackay Country that are connected with Fearchar Lighiche? Well, there is a small inlet east of Armadale called 'Port Fhearchair'. I cannot say who the Fearchar was that is named there.

Mary Beith tells us that there is a skerry near Achiniver called 'Fearchar's Rock'. I expect that the Gaels called it 'Sgeir Fhearchair'. Why 'sgeir' rather than 'creag'? Because that was, according to oral tradition, a place where Fearchar would collect carragheen – seaweed that was useful in medical treatments.

That is the conclusion of the series of Litrichean about Fearchar Lighiche. The man reminds us how the Gaels possess an old legacy of medical knowledge. Some time or other we'll take a further look at that subject.

Fhearchair'. Bha daoine dhen bheachd gun robh Fearchar Lighiche a' fuireach an sin. Chan eil dad air fhàgail dhen tobhta an-diugh.

A bheil ainmean-àite ann an Dùthaich MhicAoidh a tha co-cheangailte ri Fearchar Lighiche? Uill, tha sàilean beag sear air Armadal air a bheil 'Port Fhearchair'. Chan urrainn dhomh a ràdh cò am Fearchar a tha ainmichte ann.

Tha Màiri Beith ag innse dhuinn gu bheil sgeir faisg air Ach' an Inbhir air a bheil 'Fearchar's Rock'. Tha mi an dùil gur e Sgeir Fhearchair a chanadh na Gàidheil rithe. Carson sgeir seach creag? Oir b' e sin, a rèir beul-aithris, àite far am biodh Fearchar a' cruinneachadh cairgein – feamainn a bha feumail ann an leigheasan.

Sin agaibh deireadh an t-sreatha Litrichean mu Fhearchair Lighiche. Tha an duine a' cur nar cuimhne mar a tha seann dìleab de dh'eòlas meidigeach aig na Gàidheil. Uair no uaireigin bheir sinn sùil a bharrachd air a' chuspair sin.