

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 866 (which corresponds to Litir 1,170). Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

Did you ever hear about a man from the Highlands who earned a reputation for himself in Australia as 'The Wild Scotchman'? He was James McPherson. He belonged to Strathspey. He was a highwayman or, as they say in English, he was a bushranger. I don't think many (people) in Scotland remember him today. I want to tell you about him.

James was born in 1841 near Aviemore. It's thought that he attended school in Duthil in Strathspey.

Things were difficult there. When he was young, the potato famine happened. Seumas was thirteen years of age when his parents decided to emigrate to Australia.

They sailed on the vessel, the William Miles, from Liverpool. They reached Moreton Bay in January 1855. That's where the city of Brisbane is today. At that time, Queensland was still part of New South Wales. It's four years after that, that it achieved the status of an independent colony.

An cuala sibh riamh mu fhear às a' Ghàidhealtachd a choisinn cliù dha fhèin ann an Astràilia mar 'An t-Albannach Fiadhaich' no 'The Wild Scotsman'? B' esan Seumas Mac a' Phearsain. Bhuineadh e do Shrath Spè. Bha e na mhèirleach-rathaid no, mar a chanas iad ann am Beurla, bha e na *bhushranger*. Cha chreid mi gu bheil mòran ann an Alba ga chuimhneachadh an-diugh. Tha mi airson innse dhuibh mu dheidhinn.

Rugadh Seumas ann an ochd ceud deug, ceathrad 's a h-aon (1841) faisg air an Aghaidh Mhòir. Thathar a' smaoinneachadh gun deach e gu sgoil ann an Daothal ann an Srath Spè.

Bha cùisean doirbh an sin. Nuair a bha e òg, bha gort a' bhuntàta ann. Bha Seumas trì bliadhna deug a dh'aois nuair a roghnaich a phàrantan eilthreachd a dhèanamh gu Astràilia.

Sheòl iad air an t-soitheach, am William Miles, à Liverpool. Ràinig iad Bàgh Mhoreton anns an Fhaoilleach, ochd ceud deug, caogad 's a còig (1855). Sin far a bheil baile mòr Bhrisbane an-diugh. 'S e Brisbane prìomh bhaile Tìr na Banrigh. Aig an àm sin, bha Tìr na Banrigh fhathast mar phàirt de Chuimrigh Nuadh a Deas. 'S ann ceithir bliadhna an dèidh sin a fhuair i inbhe mar thuineachadh neo-eisimeileach.

James' father got work on an estate, a distance up the Brisbane River, called Cressbrook. He was a ploughman. It's thought that James and his brothers were working with cattle and sheep. After a while, James was skilful as a horse rider.

After four years, the family moved to Brisbane. James got an apprenticeship with a builder. He learned stonemasonry. Four years after that, the family moved out to a country area. James didn't go with them. It's then that matters started to go wrong.

Without any warning, he abandoned his apprenticeship. He met two other men. They asked him to go with them to the north. They were involved in seasonal work, such as shearing of sheep. When they didn't have work, they were involved in crime. Eventually, as we'll see, James was going to be a more notable criminal than the other two.

Fhuair athair Sheumais obair air oighreachd, pìos suas Abhainn Bhrisbane, ris an canar Cressbrook. Bha e na threabhaiche. Thathar a' smaoineachadh gun robh Seumas agus a bhràithrean ag obair le crodh is caoraich. An ceann ùine, bha Seumas sgileil mar mharcaiche.

An dèidh ceithir bliadhna, ghluais an teaghlach a Bhrisbane. Fhuair Seumas preantasachd le fear-togail. Dh'ionnsaich e clachaireachd. Ceithir bliadhna an dèidh sin, ghluais an teaghlach a-mach gu sgìre dhùthchail. Cha deach Seumas còmhla riutha. 'S ann an uair sin a thòisich cùisean a dhol ceàrr.

Gun rabhadh sam bith, thrèig e a phreasantachd. Thachair e ri dithis fhear eile. Dh'iarr iad air a dhol cuide riutha gu tuath. Bha iad ri obair ràitheil, leithid rùsgadh chaorach. Nuair nach robh obair aca, bha iad ri eucoir. Aig a' cheann thall, mar a ch'inn, bha Seumas gu bhith na eucoireach na bu chliùitiche na 'n dithis eile.