

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 872 (which corresponds to Litir 1,176). Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

We are looking at the Gaelic notes in the Book of Deer. A son of Bede caught a disease. Bede was the local Pictish leader. He refused to give Columba a place for a monastery.

Here's what happened then: ... the mormaer went to beseech the clerics that they would make a prayer [for the boy's health]... Bede agreed to give land to Columba if the boy's health returned.

The clerics made a prayer. The boy became healthy. Columba got the land. But he gave it to his companion, Drostan. Here's what is in the Book of Deer: ... Columba gave Drostan that place, and he blessed it, and left the statement – whoever would stand against it, he would not be long-lived or successful.

Columba cursed anybody that would stand against the monastery – that he would not be long-lived or successful. That means that his life would not be long or full of success.

Now, do you know Deer in Aberdeenshire? There is no sign of the monastery today. But it is thought that it was pretty much where Old Deer is situated.

Tha sinn a' toirt sùil air na notaichean Gàidhlig ann an Leabhar Dhèir. Ghabh mac aig Bede galar. B' e Bede an ceannard Cruithneach ionadail. Dhiùlt e àite airson manachainn a thoirt do Chalum Cille.

Seo na thachair an uair sin: ... chaidh am morair a dh'athchuinge nan clèireach gun dèanadh iad ùrnaigh [airson slàinte a' ghille]... Dh'aontaich Bede fearann a thoirt do Chalum Cille nan tigeadh slàinte don ghille.

Rinn na clèirich ùrnaigh. Thàinig slàinte don ghille. Fhuair Calum Cille am fearann. Ach thug e seachad e do a chompanach, Drostan. Seo na tha ann an Leabhar Dhèir: ... thug Calum Cille do Dhrostan a' chathair sin, agus bheannaich e i, agus dh'fhàg e am briathar – ge b' e a sheasadh na h-aghaidh, nach biodh e bliadhnach, buadhach.

Dh'fhàg Calum Cille mallachd air duine sam bith a sheasadh an aghaidh na manachainn – nach biodh e bliadhnach, buadhach. Tha sin a' ciallachadh nach biodh a bheatha fada no soirbheachail.

Nise, a bheil sibh eòlach air Dèir ann an Siorrachd Obar Dheathain? Chan eil sgeul air a' mhanachainn an-diugh. Ach thathar a' smaoinichadh gun robh i an ìre mhath far a bheil Old Deer.

But what does the name Deer – or Dèir – mean? A sentence in the notes tells us that:

Here are the first three words in the sentence. Tángator déara Drostán. In modern Gaelic: Thàinig deòir Dhrostan. Drostan's tears came. In the twelfth century, the Gaels would say déara where we today say deòir. Tears.

Here is the entire sentence: Drostan's tears came upon parting from Columba. Columba said, 'let Deer be its name henceforth.'

Thus the place-name Dèir – or Deer – according to the Book of Deer, came from the tears that Drostan shed when Columba left.

Who was Drostan, anyway? Fortunately, there is an account of him in the Aberdeen Breviary. It tells us that Drostan was an abbot and that his feast-day was on the 14th of December. More about him in the next Litir.

Ach dè tha an t-ainm *Deer* – no *Dèir* – a' ciallachadh? Tha seantans anns na notaichean ag innse sin dhuinn:

Seo na ciad trì faclan anns an t-seantans: *Tángator déara Drostán*. Ann an Gàidhlig an latha an-diugh: *Thàinig deòir Dhrostan*. *Drostan's tears came*. Anns an dàrna linn deug, chanadh na Gàidheil *déara* far am bi sinne ag ràdh an-diugh *deòir*. *Tears*.

Seo an seantans gu lèir: *Thàinig deòir Dhrostan air sgaradh ri Calum Cille. Labhair Calum Cille, 'biodh Dèir ainm bho seo a-mach.'*

Mar sin, thàinig an t-ainm-àite *Dèir* – no *Deer* – a rèir Leabhar Dhèir bho na deòir a leig Drostan nuair a dh'fhalbh Calum Cille.

Cò bha ann an Drostan, co-dhiù? Gu fortanach, tha cunntas air ann an Leabhar Ùrnaighean Obar Dheathain no *Breviarium Aberdonense*. Tha e ag innse dhuinn gun robh Drostan na aba agus gun robh a latha fèille air a' cheathramh latha deug dhen Dùbhlachd. Tuilleadh mu dheidhinn anns an ath Litir.