

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 887 (which corresponds to Litir 1,191). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

I was telling you about Weem – or Uaimh – in Perthshire. There are other places with Weem in the name – meaning a cave or caves.

In Angus there are several examples. At the upper end of Glen Clova, there is a place called 'Hole of Weems'. According to the Ordnance Survey Name Book, it's a big cave.

The Old Statistical Account tells us about 'Weems Hole' near Kirriemuir in the low country of Angus. That cave is large and long. Human bones were found in it.

The word went into Scots. The Scots dictionaries tell us that weem means 'cave, hole or depression in the ground, souterrain and cellar'.

To this point, we [have] looked at places where the word is spelt W-E-E-M in English. I have another one for you, where weem is at the end. That is Pittenweem in Fife. In modern Gaelic, that is Peit or Baile na h-Uamha. It means 'the farm of the cave'. There is a famous cave there – Uamh Fhaolain or St Fillan's Cave.

There are places, however, where Weems is spelt W-E-M-Y-S-S.

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh mu Weem – no Uaimh – ann an Siorrachd Pheairt. Tha àiteachan eile ann le Weem anns an ainm – a' ciallachadh uamh no uamhan.

Ann an Siorrachd Aonghais, tha grunn eisimpleirean ann. Aig ceann shuas Ghleann Chlàbhaidh, tha àite air a bheil *Hole of Weems*. A rèir Leabhar nan Ainmean aig an t-Suirbhidh Òrdanais, 's e uamh mhòr a tha ann.

Tha an Seann Chunntas Staitistigeach ag innse dhuinn mu *Weems Hole* faisg air Ceathramh Moire air Machair Aonghais. Tha an uamh sin mòr agus fada. Chaidh cnàmhan daoine a lorg innte.

Chaidh am facal a-steach don Albais. Tha na faclairean Albais ag innse dhuinn gu bheil *weem* a' ciallachadh 'uamh, toll no slochd anns an talamh, souterrain agus seilear'.

Thuige seo, thug sinn sùil air àiteachan far a bheil am facal sgrìobhte W-E-E-M ann am Beurla. Tha aonan eile agam dhuibh, far a bheil *weem* aig an deireadh. 'S e sin *Pittenweem* ann am Fìobh. Ann an Gàidhlig an latha an-diugh, 's e sin Peit no Baile na h-Uamha. Tha e a' ciallachadh '*the farm of the cave*'. Tha uamh ainmeil ann – Uamh Fhaolain no *St Fillan's Cave*.

Tha àiteachan ann, ge-tà, far a bheil 'Weems' air a litreachadh W-E-M-Y-S-S.

There is one near Forfar in the low country of Angus. In Fife, near Kirkcaldy, there are West Wemyss and East Wemyss. They are next to the shore. In East Wemyss there are many caves.

There are other places with Wemyss, such as Wemyss Bay and Wemyss Point in Ayrshire, and Port Wemyss on Islay. Perhaps it is the Wemyss family that is named in them. The Gaelic for Port Wemyss is Bun Othan, meaning 'river mouth'.

*But where did the family get the name? Sir Robert Sibbald wrote in his book *The History of Fife and Kinross* – 'The Earl of Weems takes his surname ... from the caves in his ground upon the coast to the east of the house'. Sibbald wrote the name W-E-E-M-S. Thanks for being with me looking at places abounding in caves.*

Tha fear faisg air Farfair air Machair Aonghais. Ann am Fìobh, faisg air Cathair Chaladain, tha *West Wemyss* agus *East Wemyss*. Tha iad ri taobh a' chladaich. Ann an *East Wemyss* tha tòrr uamhan ann.

Tha àiteachan eile le *Wemyss* ann, mar *Wemyss Bay* agus *Wemyss Point* ann an Siorrachd Àir, agus *Port Wemyss* ann an Ìle. Math dh'fhaodte gur e an teaghlach *Wemyss* a tha air ainmeachadh ann. 'S e a' Ghàidhlig air *Port Wemyss* – *Bun Othan*, a' ciallachadh 'beul na h-aibhne'.

Ach càit an d' fhuair an teaghlach an t-ainm? Sgrìobh Sir Raibeart Sibbald anns an leabhar aige *The History of Fife and Kinross* – 'The Earl of Weems takes his surname ... from the caves in his ground upon the coast to the east of the house'. Sgrìobh Sibbald an t-ainm W-E-E-M-S. Tapadh leibh airson a bhith còmhla rium a' toirt sùil air àiteachan uamhach.