

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 902 (which corresponds to Litir 1,206). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

I was looking at the famous book – ‘A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland’. The author was Dr Samuel Johnson. It concerns a journey that he and James Boswell took in the Highlands. That was in 1773.

One of the wee plants I like best is one called ‘cairt-làir’. It has small yellow flowers. Cairt-làir means ‘bark that grows on the ground. In English, people call it ‘tormentil’.

Why is it called ‘ground-bark’? Well, in the old days, people would use tree bark – or tree bark, particularly oak bark – to tan leather and nets. To tan leather and nets. To tan leather and nets. You’ll understand that cartadh means ‘tanning’. However, where oak trees were scarce people were using tormentil roots.

In Samuel Johnson’s book, he mentioned that. He wrote that people in the Highlands were tanning leather with oak bark and also with bèilleag. That’s the bark

Bha mi a’ toirt sùil air an leabhar ainmeil – *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*. B’ e an t-ùghdar an t-Oll. Somhairle MacLain, no Samuel Johnson. Tha e mu dheidhinn turas a ghabh e fhèin agus Seumas Boswell air a’ Ghàidhealtachd. Bha sin ann an seachd ceud deug, seachdad ’s a trì (1773).

’S e fear de na lusan beaga as fheàrr leam fear air a bheil ‘cairt-làir’. Tha flùraichean beaga buidhe air. Tha cairt-làir a’ ciallachadh ‘rùsg a tha a’ fàs air an talamh’. Ann am Beurla, canaidh daoine *tormentil* ris.

Carson as e ‘cairt-làir’ a tha air? Uill, anns an t-seann aimsir, bhiodh daoine a’ cleachdadh cairt craoibhe – no rùsg craoibhe, gu h-àraidh rùsg-daraich – airson leathar agus lìn a chartadh. *To tan leather and nets*. Airson leathar agus lìn a chartadh. Tuigidh sibh gu bheil cartadh a’ ciallachadh *tanning*. Ge-tà, far an robh craobhan-daraich gann, bha daoine a’ cleachdadh freumhaichean na cairt-làir.

Anns an leabhar aig Somhairle MacLain, rinn e iomradh air sin. Sgrìobh e gun robh daoine air a’ Ghàidhealtachd a’ cartadh leathair le rùsg-daraich agus cuideachd le bèilleag. ’S e sin rùsg na craoibhe-beithe. Ach bha iad cuideachd

of the birch tree. But they were also using tormentil roots.

Johnson wrote that tormentil roots had been recommended to the tanners of Ireland by a man who received an award for it. The award came from the Irish Parliament. Does that mean that it was a new thing at that time in Scotland also? I don't know.

Anyway, early in the 18th century, oak trees were becoming scarce in Ireland. William Maple researched tanning. He published a booklet about the matter in 1829. He received two hundred pounds from the Parliament for his work. The booklet is entitled 'A Method of Tanning without Bark'.

I reckon Maple was an English-speaker. But, in his account, he gives us five different names for tormentil in Irish Gaelic. He did good work.

a' cleachdadh freumhaichean na cairt-làir.

Sgrìobh MacIain gun robh freumhaichean na cairt-làir air am moladh do luchd-cartaidh na h-Èireann le duine a fhuair duais air a shon. Thàinig an duais bho Phàrlamaid na h-Èireann. A bheil sin a' ciallachadh gur e rud ùr a bha ann aig an àm sin ann an Alba cuideachd? Chan eil fhios a'm.

Co-dhiù, tràth anns an ochdamh linn deug, bha craobhan-daraich a' fàs gann ann an Èirinn. Rinn Uilleam Maple rannsachadh air cartadh. Dh'fhoillsich e leabhran mun ghnothach ann an ochd ceud deug, fichead 's a naoi (1829). Fhuair e dà cheud not bhon Phàrlamaid airson a chuid obrach. 'S e an tiotal a tha air an leabhran 'A Method of Tanning without Bark'.

Saoilidh mi gur e fear na Beurla a bh' ann am Maple. Ach, anns a' chunntas aige, tha e a' toirt dhuinn còig diofar ainmean air a' chairt-làir ann an Gàidhlig na h-Èireann. Rinn e obair mhath.