

An Litir Bheag **le Ruairidh MacIleathain**

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 903 (which corresponds to Litir 1,207). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

In the book – ‘A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland’ – Dr Samuel Johnson writes about the Isle of Coll. He was staying with the laird and clan chief, Maclean. Nearby there was an old castle – Breacacha Castle.

On the wall of the castle this was at one time inscribed on a stone: If any man of the clan of Maclonich shall appear before this castle, though he come at midnight, with a man's head in his hand, he shall there find safety and protection against all but the King.

Johnson explains the situation. James VII gave land that had been owned by the Camerons to the Macleans. The Camerons weren't willing to give it away. Maclean went with a force to take it over at the point of a sword. He took his wife with him.

There was a battle near Fort Augustus. The wife of the clan chief was abducted. She was pregnant. She was put in the care of a Maclonich – who belonged to the Camerons. He was under orders, when the child was born, to kill it if it should be a boy.

Anns an leabhar – A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland – tha an t-Oll. Somhairle MacIain a' sgrìobhadh mu Eilean Cholla. Bha e a' fuireach aig an uachdaran agus ceann-cinnidh, MacIleathain. Faisg air làimh, bha seann chaisteal – Caisteal Bhreac-achaidh.

Air balla a' chaisteil bha seo uaireigin air a shnaigheadh air clach: Ma nochdas duine sam bith a bhuineas do Chlann Ghill' Eonaidh mu choinneimh a' chaisteil seo, ged a thigeadh e aig meadhan-oidhche, le ceann duine na làimh, gheibh e fàsghadh agus dìon an aghaidh a h-uile duine ach a-mhàin an Rìgh.

Tha MacIain a' mìneachadh a' ghnothaich. Thug Seumas VII fearann a bha leis na Camshronaich do na Leathanaich. Cha robh na Camshronaich deònach a thoirt seachad. Chaidh MacIleathain le feachd airson a ghabhail thairis aig bior a' chlaidheimh. Thug e a bhean leis.

Bha cath faisg air Cille Chuimein. Chaill na Leathanaich. Chaidh bean a' chinn-chinnidh a thoirt am bruid. Bha i trom le leanabh. Bha i air a cur fo smachd aig fear Mac Gill' Eonaidh – a bhuineadh do na Camshronaich. Bha esan fo òrdugh, nuair a bha an leanabh air a bhreith, a chur gu bas nam b' e gille a bha ann.

Maclonich's wife was also pregnant. A baby girl was born to her. The Maclean widow gave birth to a boy. And Maclonich swapped them. The young Maclean survived. He was raised in Maclonich's house.

Eventually, he retrieved his leadership of the Macleans. He was grateful to Maclonich. He made his castle a refuge for anybody of that clan who was in danger.

One of the Maclonichs, Ewen Cameron, took advantage of the compact. He had been involved in the death of a man called MacMartin.

As punishment the chief of the Camerons banished him to France for a period. When that time was over, Ewen returned home. But the MacMartins were not satisfied with his punishment. They threatened to kill him. He fled to Coll. He obtained refuge in Breacacha Castle.

Bha a' bhean aig Mac Gill' Eonaidh cuideachd trom. Rugadh leanabh-nighinne dhi. Rugadh gille don bhantraich Leathanaich. Agus rinn Mac Gill' Eonaidh suaip eatarra. Mhair an Leathanach òg beò. Thogadh e anns an taigh aig Mac Gill' Eonaidh.

Tro thìde, fhuair e a cheannas aig na Leathanaich air ais. Bha e taingeil do Mhac Gill' Eonaidh. Rinn e a chaisteal na thèarmann do dhuine sam bith dhen chinneadh sin a bha ann an cunnart.

Ghabh fear de Chlann Ghill' Eonaidh, Eòghann Camshron, brath air a' chùmhnannt. Bha e air a bhith an sàs ann am bàs fir air an robh MacMhàrtainn mar ainm.

Mar pheanas, chuir ceann-cinnidh nan Camshronach air fògradh e don Fhraing airson ùine. Nuair a bha an ùine seachad, thill Eòghann dhachaigh. Ach cha robh na Màrtainnich riarichte le a pheanas. Mhaoidh iad air gun robh iad a' dol ga mharbhadh. Theich e a Cholla. Fhuair e tèarmann ann an Caisteal Bhreacachaidh.