

## **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 923 (which corresponds to Litir 1,227). Ruairidh can be contacted at [fios@learngaelic.scot](mailto:fios@learngaelic.scot).

*Did you ever hear the opinion that a great 'royal' forest should be planted in the Highlands? An oak forest. I was reading a paper the other day that was published by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in 1793. It was written by a certain 'John Williams, Mineral Surveyor'. He was recommending a plan to plant a 'Royal Oak Forest' in the Highlands.*

*I don't know too much about Williams himself, except that he wrote a book – The Natural History of the Mineral Kingdom. In the paper about forestry, he wrote that thousands of acres in the Highlands were suitable for trees. However, as matters were, goats and cattle were damaging them.*

*Williams criticized the Highlanders. They were killing the oak trees. They were cutting the bark from them for tanning leather. He was also severely criticizing the landlords, their factors and the tacksmen. They were not looking after the forest.*

*The western Highlands were particularly the subject of his attention. Sea-lochs are plentiful there. For Williams, they were like*

An cuala sibh riamh am beachd gum bu chòir do choille mhòr 'rìoghail' a bhith air a cur air a' Ghàidhealtachd? Coille-dharaich. Bha mi a' leughadh pàipear an latha eile a chaidh fhoillseachadh le Comann Àrsairean na h-Alba ann an seachd ceud deug, naochad 's a trì (1793). Bha e air a sgrìobhadh le fear 'John Williams, Mineral Surveyor'. Bha e a' moladh plana airson 'Coille-dharaich Rìoghail' a chur air a' Ghàidhealtachd.

Chan aithne dhomh cus mu Williams fhèin, ach gun do sgrìobh e leabhar – *The Natural History of the Mineral Kingdom*. Anns a' phàipear mu choilltearachd, sgrìobh e gun robh mìltean de dh'acairean air a' Ghàidhealtachd freagarrach airson chraobhan. Ge-tà, mar a bha cùisean, bha gobhair agus crodh a' dèanamh cron orra.

Rinn Williams càineadh air na Gàidheil. Bha iad a' marbhadh nan craobhan-daraich. Bha iad a' gearradh an rùisg dhiubh airson leathar a chartadh. Bha e cuideachd a' càineadh nan uachdaran, am bàillidhean agus na fìr-taca gu dubh. Cha robh iad cùramach don choille.

Bha taobh an iar na Gàidhealtachd gu sònraichte fo a phrosbaig. Tha lochan-mara pailt ann. Do Williams, bha iad mar

*'canals', allowing people to extract timber from the country.*

*In particular, he was naming the following places: Coigach in Wester Ross; and, in Lochaber – Loch Eil, Loch Lochy, Loch Leven and Loch Arkaig.*

*And what was his vision? It was that oak trees would be planted and protected. They would grow enormous. They would be taken away by sea to any corner in Britain to build ships.*

*Williams wasn't entirely forgetting the local people, however. He wrote that people would obtain employment in forestry, that the landlords would make a bigger profit and that a shipbuilding industry could be established in Fort William. He wanted the government to put the estates they annexed from Jacobite landlords under the management of a senior forester.*

*Well, it didn't happen. But, if it had happened, the Highlands would be very different today.*

*'chanàlaichean', a' toirt cothrom do dhaoine fiodhrach a thoirt às an dùthaich.*

*Gu sònraichte, bha e ag ainmeachadh nan àiteachan a leanas: A' Chòigeach ann an Ros an Iar; agus, ann an Loch Abar – Loch Iall, Loch Lòchaidh, Loch Liobhann agus Loch Airceig.*

*Agus dè an lèirsinn a bh' aige? Bha gum biodh craobhan-daraich air an cur agus air an dìon. Bhiodh iad a' fàs mòr mòr. Bhiodh iad air an toirt air falbh aig muir gu ceàrnaidh sam bith ann am Breatainn airson longan a thogail.*

*Cha robh Williams buileach a' dìochuimhneachadh muinntir an àite, ge-tà. Sgrìobh e gum faigheadh daoine obair ann an coilltearachd, gun dèanadh na h-uachdarain prothaid nas motha agus gum b' urrainn gnìomhachas togail-longan a shuidheachadh anns a' Ghearasdan. Bha e airson 's gun cuireadh an riaghaltas na h-oighreachdan a ghabh iad thairis bho uachdarain Sheumasach fo smachd àrd-choilltear.*

*Uill, cha do thachair e. Ach, nam bitheadh e air tachairt, bhiodh a' Ghàidhealtachd gu math eadar-dhealaichte an-diugh.*