

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 924 (which corresponds to Litir 1,228). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

I want to tell you about research that E.G. Ravenstein, Ernst Georg Ravenstein, conducted in the nineteenth century. He was a German, but he spent most of his professional life in England.

Ravenstein was a cartographer. He was a member of the governing councils of the Royal Statistical Society and the Royal Geographical Society. He made a famous map of central Africa. And he made the illustrations and figures for Philip's World Atlas over a long period.

Ravenstein researched the Celtic languages. He published a paper for the Royal Statistical Society in 1879. It contains valuable information about Gaelic.

How did Ravenstein collect his information? Well, he sent letters to people who would know about the language's condition in their area. People like birth registrars, church officials and schoolmasters.

He encountered difficulty in getting information back from

Tha mi airson innse dhuibh mu rannsachadh a rinn E.G. Ravenstein, Ernst Georg Ravenstein, anns an naoidheamh linn deug. 'S e Gearmailteach a bha ann, ach chuir e seachad a' chuid a bu mhotha de a bheatha phroifeiseanta ann an Sasainn.

Bha Ravenstein na chairt-iùiliche. Bha e na bhall de chomhairlean-stiùiridh a' Chomainn Rìoghail Statastaigeil agus a' Chomainn Rìoghail Chruinn-eòlaich. Rinn e mapa ainmeil de mheadhan Afraga. Agus rinn e na dealbhan agus figearan airson Philip's World Atlas fad ùine mhòr.

Rinn Ravenstein rannsachadh air na cànanan Ceilteach. Dh'fhoillsich e pàipear airson a' Chomainn Rìoghail Statastaigeil ann an ochd ceud deug, seachdad 's a naoi (1879). Tha fiosrachadh priseil ann mun Ghàidhlig.

Ciamar a chruinnich Ravenstein am fiosrachadh aige? Uill, chuir E litrichean a-mach gu daoine aig am biodh fios air staid a' chànan anns an nàbachd aca. Daoine mar luchd-clàraidh breithe, pearsaichean-eaglais agus maighstirean-sgoile.

Bha duilgheadas aige fios fhaighinn air ais bho chuid de

some communities. In those cases, he enquired of the place's major innkeeper. Ravenstein admitted that perhaps he didn't get the full truth about Gaelic's state in every place. But, in general, he was reckoning that his conclusions were close to the truth.

Ravenstein estimated the number of Gaelic-speakers in Scotland at 301,000. 267,000 [of them] were living in the Highlands [broadly measured] and 34,000 in the Lowlands. Over half of Scotland – in terms of land area – Gaelic was spoken by a majority of the population. But that was representing just eight percent of Scotland's people.

And what was the most Gaelic county in 1879? Well, here are the four most Gaelic counties and the percentage of people who were able to speak Gaelic in each one. Ross and Cromarty 76.9; Argyll 81.8; Inverness 83.3 and Sutherland 89.6. Yup, Sutherland was the most Gaelic county at that time. That's thought-provoking!

choimhearsnachdan. Anns na cùisean sin, chuir e fios gu prìomh òstair an àite. Dh'aidich Ravenstein gur dòcha nach d'fhuair e an fhìrinn ghlan mu staid na Gàidhlig anns a h-uile àite. Ach, anns an fharsaingeachd, bha e a' cumail a-mach gun robh a cho-dhùnaidhean faisg air an fhìrinn.

Thomhais Ravenstein àireamh luchd-labhairt na Gàidhlig ann an Alba aig trì cheud 's a h-aon mìle (301,000). Bha dà cheud, seasgad 's a seachd mìle (267,000) a' fuireach air a' Ghàidhealtachd agus trithead 's a ceithir mìle (34,000) air a' Ghalltachd. Thairis air an dàrna leth de dh'Alba air fad – a rèir meud na tìre – bha Gàidhlig aig a' mhòr-chuid dhen t-sluagh. Ach bha sin a' riochdachadh dìreach ochd às a' cheud de mhuinntir na h-Alba.

Agus dè an t-siorrachd a bu Ghàidhealaiche a bh' ann ann an ochd ceud deug, seachdad 's a naoi (1879)? Uill, seo agaibh na ceithir siorrachdan a bu Ghàidhealaiche agus an ceudad de dhaoine aig an robh Gàidhlig anns gach tè dhiubh. Ros is Crombaidh 76.9; Earra-Ghàidheal 81.8; Inbhir Nis 83.3 agus Cataibh 89.6. Seadh, b' e Cataibh an t-siorrachd a bu Ghàidhealaiche an uair sin. Smaoinichibh!