

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 925 (which corresponds to Litir 1,229). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

Last week, I was telling you about the paper that E.G. Ravenstein wrote about the state of the Celtic languages. Among other things, Ravenstein estimated the language skills in the areas where Gaelic was spoken by a majority. It's in those areas that most of the people with no English lived. They only spoke Gaelic.

In the following counties, every person with Gaelic was also fluent in English: Caithness, Forfar, Stirling and Dumbarton. But in other counties there were some who did not speak English. In Inverness-shire 34% of the people in the most Gaelic areas did not speak English. That was higher than any other county. The figures for Ross & Cromarty and Argyll were lower – at 14% and 17%.

It surprised me that the figure for Inverness-shire was so high. But it was including Harris, Uist & Barra, Skye and western Lochaber. Gaelic was strong in those areas.

It's interesting to compare three islands in the Firth of Clyde.

An t-seachdain sa chaidh, bha mi ag innse dhuibh mun phàipear a sgrìobh E. G. Ravenstein mu staid nan cànanan Ceilteach. Am measg eile, rinn Ravenstein tomhas air sgilean cànan anns na ceàrnaidhean far an robh Gàidhlig aig a' mhòr-chuid. 'S ann anns na sgìrean sin a bha a' chuid a bu mhotha de na daoine aig nach robh Beurla. Cha robh aca ach Gàidhlig.

Anns na siorrachdan a leanas, bha a h-uile duine aig an robh Gàidhlig cuideachd fileanta ann am Beurla: Gallaibh, Farfair, Sruighlea agus Dùn Breatann. Ach ann an siorrachdan eile bha feadhainn ann aig nach robh Beurla. Ann an Siorrachd Inbhir Nis, cha robh Beurla aig trithead 's a ceithir às a' cheud (34%) de na daoine anns na sgìrean as Gàidhealaiche. Bha sin na b' àirde na siorrachd sam bith eile. Bha na figearan airson Rois is Chrombaidh agus Earra-Ghàidheal na b' ìsle – aig 14% agus 17%.

Chuir e iongnadh orm gun robh am figear airson Siorrachd Inbhir Nis cho àrd. Ach bha e a' gabhail a-steach Na Hearadh, Uibhist is Barraigh, An t-Eilean Sgitheanach agus taobh an iar Loch Abar. Bha a' Ghàidhlig làidir anns na sgìrean sin.

Tha e inntinneach coimeas a dhèanamh eadar trì eileanan ann an Linne

In Cumbrae, the population was now entirely non-Gaelic speaking. Circumstances were different on the Isle of Bute. There was a big population there – more than ten thousand people. 18% of the island's people still spoke Gaelic. But Ravenstein tells us that most of the Bute Gaels had come from Argyll.

[Please] listen to the figures for the Isle of Arran. Ravenstein reckoned that nine persons out of every ten on that island in 1879 were Gaelic-speakers. They were, however, all bilingual. Little by little, the English language was getting the upper hand. Gaelic had no place in education on the island. Seven years after the Education Act came into being, that is not a surprise.

Chluaidh. Ann an Cumaradh, bha an sluagh a-nise gu tur Gallta. Bha cùisean eadar-dhealaichte ann an Eilean Bhòid. Bha sluagh mòr a' fuireach ann – còrr is deich mìle duine. Bha Gàidhlig fhathast aig ochd-deug às a' cheud de mhuinntir an eilein. Ach tha Ravenstein ag innse dhuinn gur ann à Earra-Ghàidheal a thàinig a' chuid a bu mhotha de na Gàidheil Bhòdach.

Nach èist sibh ris na figearan airson Eilean Arainn. Bha Ravenstein dhen bheachd gun robh Gàidhlig aig naoinear às gach deichnear anns an eilean sin ann an ochd ceud deug, seachdad 's a naoi (1879). Bha iad, ge-tà, uile dà-chànanach. Mean air mhean, bha a' Bheurla a' faighinn làmh an uachdair. Cha robh àite aig a' Ghàidhlig ann am foghlam anns an eilean. Seachd bliadhna an dèidh do dh'Achd an Fhoghlaim thighinn gu bith, chan eil sin na iongnadh.