

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 982 (which corresponds to Litir 1,286). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

I was walking on a rathad-ciste a wee while ago. That means 'coffin road'. That's a route that people were taking between the village and the cemetery.

There was a sign at one end of it. It was saying that the road was called 'Rathad na Ciste'. A Gaelic name. The road was just about as straight as an arrow, going between river and cemetery. Or it was, at one time. The river is the River Spey and the village is Newtonmore in Badenoch.

In olden times, when people in wee settlements like Nuide and Ralia died, their bodies were taken across the River Spey in a small boat. They were then carried on the coffin road to Bride's cemetery. That's the ancient cemetery in Banchor. Newtonmore was built to the east of the cemetery early in the 19th century.

People were using the road for centuries. The first 6-inch (to the mile) Ordnance Survey map shows a straight road to Bride's cemetery. People did research for that map in 1870.

Bha mi a' coiseachd air rathad-ciste o chionn greis. Tha sin a' ciallachadh 'coffin road'. 'S e sin slighe a bha daoine a' gabhail eadar am baile agus an cladh.

Bha sanas ann aig aon cheann dheth. Bha e ag ràdh gur e 'Rathad na Ciste' an t-ainm air an rathad. Ainm Gàidhlig. Tha an rathad an ìre mhath cho dìreach ri saighead, a' dol eadar abhainn agus cladh. No bha, aig aon àm. 'S e an abhainn Uisge Spè, agus 's e am baile Baile Ùr an t-Slèibh ann am Bàideanach.

Anns an t-seann aimsir, nuair a bha daoine ann am bailtean beaga mar Noid agus Ràth Liath a' bàsachadh, bha an cuirp air an toirt tarsainn Uisge Spè ann an coit. Bha iad an uair sin air an giùlan air Rathad na Ciste gu ruige Cladh Bhrìghde. 'S e sin am fìor sheann chladh ann am Beannchar. Bha Baile Ùr an t-Slèibh air a thogail gu sear air a' chladh tràth anns an naoidheamh linn deug.

Bha daoine a' cleachdadh an rathaid fad nan ceudan. Tha a' chiad mhapa sia-òirlich aig an t-Suirbhìdh Òrdanais a' sealltainn rathad dìreach gu Cladh Bhrìghde. Rinn daoine rannsachadh airson a' mhapa sin ann an ochd ceud deug is seachdad (1870).

Just six years after that, however, matters changed. The road was going through land owned by a landlord. It was run as a farm. And the landlord and farmer built a steading exactly where the road was, near the cemetery. That closed the road to the cemetery. People were displeased. They took the matter to the Court of Session in Edinburgh. They were assisted by a well-known lawyer that belonged to Badenoch – Peter Cattanach.

The landlord was told that he had to build another road to the cemetery. And he had to erect a sign, telling people – in Gaelic – that they had legal rights to go to the cemetery on the new road.

And the sign is still there. It says, only in Gaelic, ‘the road established in law to Bride’s cemetery.’

Dìreach sia bliadhna an dèidh sin, ge-tà, dh’atharraich cùisean. Bha an rathad a’ dol tro fhearann a bha le uachdaran. Bha e air a ruith mar thuathanas. Agus thog an t-uachdaran agus an tuathanach sabhal dìreach far an robh an rathad, faisg air a’ chladh. Dhùin sin an rathad don chladh. Bha daoine mì-thoilichte. Thug iad a’ chùis gu Cùirt an t-Seisein ann an Dùn Èideann. Fhuair iad taic bho neach-lagh ainmeil a bhuineadh do Bhàideanach – Peter Cattanach.

Chaidh innse don uachdaran gun robh aige ri rathad eile a thogail don chladh. Agus bha aige ri soidhne a chur an-àirde, ag innse do dhaoine – ann an Gàidhlig – gun robh còraichean laghail aca dhol don chladh air an rathad ùr.

Agus tha an soidhne ann fhathast. Tha e ag ràdh, ann an Gàidhlig a-mhàin, ‘An Rathad Daingnichte le Lagh gu Cladh Bhrìghde’.