

An Litir Bheag

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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 1,087 (which corresponds to Litir 1,391). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

What is the Gaelic for 'town crier'? The dictionaries give us these: gairmear, glaodhadair, geocair, èigheadair, gairm-ghille. They were common at one time in Scotland's towns. Where they still exist today, it is just for fun or to keep a town's heritage alive. There is no need for them now. We get the latest news on our mobile phones!

I was reading an account about a man in Inverness who was in that profession in the 19th century. That was John Stephen. He was known as 'Jock' in English and 'Iain' in Gaelic. The account about him was in English. They were calling him a 'bellman or public crier'.

This is in Dwelly's dictionary – 'bellman' – 'fear-cluig'. I suspect that was the Gaelic, in Inverness at least, for 'town crier'. Why a 'bellman'? Well, Jock was catching people's attention on the street by ringing a bell.

Jock was not just a bellman. He was also a drummer. Apparently, when his news wasn't too important, Jock was ringing

Dè a' Ghàidhlig a tha air 'town crier'? Tha na faclairean a' toirt seo dhuinn: gairmear, glaodhadair, geocair, èigheadair, gairm-ghille. Bha iad cumanta aig aon àm ann am bailtean na h-Alba. Far a bheil iad fhathast an-diugh, tha iad ann dìreach airson spòrs, no airson dualchas baile a chumail beò. Chan eil feum orra tuilleadh. Gheibh sinn an naidheachd as ùire air na fònaichean-làimhe againn!

Bha mi a' leughadh cunntas mu fhear ann an Inbhir Nis a bha anns an dreuchd sin anns an naoidheamh linn deug. B' e sin John Stephen. Bha e aithnichte mar 'Jock' ann am Beurla agus 'Iain' ann an Gàidhlig. Bha an cunntas mu a dheidhinn ann am Beurla. Bha iad a' gabhail 'bellman or public crier' air.

Tha seo ann am Faclair Dwelly – 'bellman' – 'fear-cluig'. Tha mi an amharas gur e sin a' Ghàidhlig a bha aca, ann an Inbhir Nis co-dhiù, airson 'town crier'. Carson 'fear-cluig'? Uill, bha Iain a' glacadh aire dhaoine air an t-sràid le bhith a' seinn clag.

Cha b' e fear-cluig a-mhàin a bha ann an Iain. Bha e na dhrumair cuideachd. A rèir choltais, nuair nach robh an naidheachd aige ro mhòr, bha Iain a' seinn a chluig. An uair sin, bha e a' gairm a

his bell. Then he was telling the news. However, when he had really important news to impart, such as government business, Jock was playing a drum. A town officer had the important document.

The officer was clearing people out of the way. That was until the bellman was in the right place to report the news. I reckon that would have been outside the Town House. The officer was giving him the document. And Jock was shouting the news to the listeners.

Would he say ‘Hear ye, hear ye!’? Or would he say, ‘Èistibh, èistibh!’? Well, there’s a question. When Jock took his job in 1841, nearly every second person in Inverness spoke Gaelic. Jock belonged to the town and, apparently – as we shall see in the next Litir – he had Gaelic.

naidheachd. Ge-tà, nuair a bha naidheachd mhòr mhòr aige ri aithris, leithid gnothach aig an riaghaltas, bha Iain a’ cluich drum. Bha an sgrìobhainn chudromach aig oifigear a’ bhaile.

Bha an t-oifigear a’ cur daoine a-mach às an rathad. Bha sin gus an robh am fear-cluig anns an àite cheart airson a naidheachd aithris. Tha mi a’ dèanamh dheth gum biodh sin taobh a-muigh Taigh a’ Bhaile. Bha an t-oifigear a’ toirt na sgrìobhainn dha. Agus bha Iain ag èigheachd na naidheachd don luchd-èisteachd.

An canadh e, ‘Hear ye, hear ye!’? No an canadh e, ‘Èistibh, èistibh!’? Uill, ’s e ceist a tha sin. Nuair a ghabh Iain a dhreuchd ann an ochd ceud deug, ceathrad ’s a dhà (1842), bha Gàidhlig aig an ìre mhath gach dàrnacha duine ann an Inbhir Nis. Bhuineadh Iain don bhaile agus, a rèir choltais – mar a chì sinn anns an ath Litir – bha Gàidhlig aige.