

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 1,104 (which corresponds to Litir 1,408). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

I was recently looking at the Inverness Courier from the 19th century. I took pleasure from the articles by the Reverend Alexander Stewart or 'Nether Lochaber'. He was writing in English but his attention was often on Gaelic, and the heritage of the Gaels, in his writings. He was a serious Gaelic scholar.

Alexander Stewart was born in Benbecula in 1829. His family belonged to Appin in Argyll. His parents were living in Benbecula because his father was working for the Inland Revenue in the islands.

When Alexander was young, the family moved to the mainland. They were in Oban and Kirkmichael in Perthshire. Alexander learned about the heritage of the Gaels in those years.

He went to St Andrews and he learned Literature, Mathematics, Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Philosophy and Divinity. He started as a minister in the Church of Scotland in 1851. That was in Ballachulish and Ardgour.

O chionn ghoirid bha mi a' toirt sùil air Courier Inbhir Nis on naoidheamh linn deug. Ghabh mi tlachd de na h-altan leis an Urramach Alasdair Stiùbhart no 'Nether Lochaber'. Bha e a' sgrìobhadh ann am Beurla ach bha aire gu tric air a' Ghàidhlig, agus air dualchas nan Gàidheal, anns na sgrìobhaidhean aige. 'S e fìor sgoilear na Gàidhlig a bha ann.

Rugadh Alasdair Stiùbhart ann am Beinn nam Fadhla anns a' bhliadhna ochd ceud deug, fichead 's a naoi (1829). Bhuineadh a theaghlach don Apainn ann an Earra-Gàidheal. Bha a phàrantan a' fuireach ann am Beinn nam Fadhla oir bha athair ag obair do dh'Oifis nan Cìsean Nàiseanta anns na h-eileanan.

Nuair a bha Alasdair òg, ghluais an teaghlach gu tìr-mòr. Bha iad anns an Òban, agus ann an Cill Mhicheil ann an Siorrachd Pheairt. Dh'ionnsaich Alasdair tòrr mu dhualchas nan Gàidheal anns na bliadhnaichean sin.

Chaidh e gu Oilthigh Chill Rìmhinn agus dh'ionnsaich e Litreachas, Matamataig, Greugais, Laideann, Eabhrais, Feallsanachd agus Diadhachd. Thòisich e mar mhinistear ann an Eaglais na h-Alba ann an ochd ceud deug, caogad 's a h-aon (1851). Bha sin ann am Baile a' Chaolais agus Àird Ghobhar.

Every second Sabbath he would be preaching in Ardgour. On the other Sabbaths, he would be preaching in Onich. That's in Loch Abar Ìochdarach or, in English, Nether Lochaber. That's the reason that Alexander wrote under the nom-de-plume 'Nether Lochaber'. Many people knew him as 'Nether Lochaber' rather than 'Mr Stewart'!

He married Janet Morrison who belonged to Ardgour. They would have three children – two girls and a boy. He was a minister in Nether Lochaber until he died in 1901.

He was industrious enough as a minister, but he won a reputation for himself particularly as a writer. For many years he wrote a column in the Inverness Courier. What he wrote was put together in two books – Nether Lochaber and 'Twixt Ben Nevis and Glencoe. I'll tell you about his writing in the next Litir.

Gach dàrnacha Sàbaid bhiodh e a' searmonachadh ann an Àird Ghobhar. Air na Sàbaidean eile, bhiodh e a' searmonachadh ann an Omhanaich. Tha sin ann an Loch Abar Ìochdarach no, ann am Beurla, *Nether Lochaber*. 'S e sin as coireach gun do sgrìobh Alasdair fon ainm-pinn '*Nether Lochaber*'. Bha gu leòr eòlach air mar '*Nether Lochaber*' seach '*Mgr Stiubhart*'!

Phòs e Seònaid Mhoireasdan a bhuineadh do dh'Àird Ghobhar. Bhiodh trìùir chloinne aca – dithis nighean agus balach. Bha e na mhinistear ann an Loch Abar Ìochdarach gus an do chaochail e ann an naoi ceud deug 's a h-aon (1901).

Bha e dìcheallach gu leòr mar mhinistear, ach choisinn e cliù dha fhèin gu sònraichte mar sgrìobhadair. Fad iomadh bliadhna sgrìobh e colbh ann an Courier Inbhir Nis. Chaidh na sgrìobh e a chur còmhla ann an dà leabhar – *Nether Lochaber* agus '*Twixt Ben Nevis and Glencoe*'. Innsidh mi dhuibh mun sgrìobhadh aige anns an ath Litir.