

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 1,113 (which corresponds to Litir 1,417). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

I was telling you about the first-class scholar Uilleam MacBhatair or William J. Watson. His book 'The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland' was published a hundred years ago. In the chapter about rivers, Watson tells us that rivers were sacred to the Celts on the mainland of Europe.

Such things continued even when Christianity came. Watson looks at 'supernatural' creatures that are connected to rivers in Scotland. He tells us about a 'river sprite' that was living in Glen Quoich in Inverness-shire; her name was Cuachag.

And, in Glen Etive, there was a supernatural creature. She was Èiteag. Watson writes that he knew a man who knew a man who had met with Èiteag.

The Celtic scholar, George Henderson, wrote that there was a phrase in Strathspey concerning the River Nethy. When it was steadily filling, soon to flood, the people would say 'tha na Neithichean a' tighinn' (the Nethy sprites are coming). And, in Benbecula, there is a burn that was called A'

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh mun t-sàr-sgoilear Uilleam MacBhatair no William J. Watson. Chaidh an leabhar aige 'The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland' fhoillseachadh o chionn ceud bliadhna. Anns a' chaibideil mu dheidhinn ainmean aibhnichean, tha MacBhatair ag innse dhuinn gun robh aibhnichean naomh do na Ceiltich air tìr-mòr na Roinn-Eòrpa.

Lean a leithid eadhon nuair a thàinig Crìosdachd. Tha MacBhatair a' toirt sùil air creutairean 'os-nàdarrach' a tha ceangailte ri aibhnichean ann an Alba. Tha e ag innse dhuinn mu 'river sprite' a bha a' fuireach ann an Gleann Cuaich ann an Siorrachd Inbhir Nis; b' e a h-ainm Cuachag.

Agus, ann an Gleann Èite, bha creutair os-nàdarrach ann. B' ise Èiteag. Tha MacBhatair a' sgrìobhadh gun robh e eòlach air fear a bha eòlach air fear a bha air tachairt ri Èiteag.

Sgrìobh an sgoilear Ceilteach, Seòras MacEanraig, gun robh abairt ann an Srath Spè mu Uisge Neithich. Nuair a bha i a' sìor lìonadh, agus tuil gu bhith ann, chanadh na daoine, 'tha na Neithichean a' tighinn' (the Nethy sprites are coming). Agus, ann am Beinn nam Fadhlà, tha allt ann air an robh A' Ghamhnach 'the farrow cow' mar ainm.

Ghamhnach ‘<i>the farrow cow. When people were crossing the burn, they would throw a wisp of grass into the water, saying ‘fodar don Ghamhnaich’ (fodder for the Gamhnach).</i> <i>Watson tells us about the urisks in Breadalbane – creatures that were somewhat like humans. They were living near burns and fords. The most famous of them was Peallaidh who gave his name to Obar Pheallaidh in Perthshire. That’s Aberfeldy in English.</i> <i>And Watson has a report about Cailleach na h-Abhann ‘the river hag’ in Ross-shire. She was living at the fords on the River Orrin – a place that was dangerous in olden times. And he wrote this in English – It is not too much to say that the feeling of divinity pervades and colours the whole system of our ancient stream nomenclature’. Aye, indeed. Sacredness is connected to the burns and rivers of Scotland.</i>	Nuair a bha daoine a’ dol tarsainn an uillt, bhiodh iad a’ tilgeil sop feòir don uisge, agus a’ cantainn ‘fodar don Ghamhnaich’ (<i>fodder for the Gamhnach</i>). Tha MacBhatair ag innse dhuinn mu na h-ùrsghean ann am Braghaid Albainn – creutairean a bha car coltach ri daoine. Bha iad a’ fuireach faisg air uillt agus àthannan. B’ e am fear a b’ ainmeile dhiubh Peallaidh a thug ainm do dh’Obar Pheallaidh ann an Siorrachd Pheairt. Sin <i>Aberfeldy</i> ann am Beurla. Agus tha aithris aig MacBhatair mu Chailleach na h-Abhann ‘<i>the river hag</i>’ ann an Siorrachd Rois. Bha ise beò aig na h-àthannan air Abhainn Orthainn – àite a bha cunnartach anns an t-seann aimsir. Agus sgrìobh e seo ann am Beurla – ‘It is not too much to say that the feeling of divinity pervades and colours the whole system of our ancient stream nomenclature’. Seadh, gu dearbh. Tha naomhachd co-cheangailte ri uillt is aibhnichean na h-Alba.
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