

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 225 (which corresponds to Litir 529). Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I got an email from a man who belongs to Inverness. The man's mother was brought up in Inverness also. She was raised in an area called Merkinch. Gaelic was alive in Merkinch longer than in any other area of Inverness. My friend's mother didn't speak Gaelic. But she had Gaelic words in her English.

One day, my friend was visiting his mother. He had a lump on his neck. It was a thing called a "cyst" in English. His mother looked at the lump. She said in English that it was a farach. A farach.

My friend was remembering that word recently. He was thinking that it was a Gaelic word. He looked in the Gaelic dictionaries. Farach wasn't there. But, in Dwelly's dictionary, there are farach-donn and farach-dubh. Both of those mean Lus nan Cnapan. Lus nan Cnapan is the Gaelic for the Common Figwort or Scrophularia nodosa. The lumps are on the roots of the plant. That's where nodosa comes from also – there are nodules on it.

Fhuair mi post-d bho dhuine à Inbhir Nis. Thogadh màthair an duine ann an Inbhir Nis cuideachd. Thogadh i ann an sgìre ris an canar Marc-Innis. Bha a' Ghàidhlig beò ann am Marc-Innis nas fhaide na sgìre sam bith eile ann an Inbhir Nis. Cha robh Gàidhlig aig màthair mo charaid. Ach bha faclan Gàidhlig anns a' Bheurla aice.

Latha a bha seo, bha mo charaid a' tadhal air a mhàthair. Bha cnap air amhaich. B' e rud ris an canar cyst ann am Beurla. Choimhead a mhàthair air a' chnap. Thuirt i, ann am Beurla, gur e farach a bha ann. Farach.

Bha mo charaid a' cuimhn-eachadh an fhacail sin o chionn ghoirid. Bha e a' smaoin-eachadh gur e facal Gàidhlig a bha ann. Choimhead e anns na faclair-ean Gàidhlig. Cha robh farach ann. Ach, ann am faclair Dwelly, tha farach-donn agus farach-dubh ann. Tha an dà rud sin a' ciallachadh Lus nan Cnapan. 'S e Lus nan Cnapan a' Ghàidhlig air Common Figwort no Scrophularia nodosa. Tha na cnapan air freumhaichean an luis. 'S ann às a sin a tha nodosa a' tighinn cuideachd – tha nodules air.

Have you ever heard of the “Doctrine of Signatures”? That was a thing in olden times. When a part of a plant was like a human organ, people were thinking that the plant was curing [would cure] a disease affecting [on] the organ. In the book The Gaelic Names of Plants by John Cameron (1883) here’s what he wrote about Lus nan Cnapan: “..from the resemblance of its roots to tumours ... it was esteemed a remedy for all scrofulous diseases.” Lus nan Cnapan, Scrophularia nòd-osa, was a treatment for a disease called scrofula in English. In scrofula (or “the king’s disease” in Gaelic) lumps appear on the neck of the person who is sick.

Well, here’s my thought. Farach means a lump. Thus, farach-dubh and farach-donn were some people’s names for Lus nan Cnapan. Lus nan Cnapan was a cure for scrofula – a disease in which lumps appear on the neck. If you yourself have a thought on that, won’t you let me know?

An cuala sibh riamh mun *Doctrine of Signatures*? B’ e sin rud anns an t-seann aimsir. Nuair a bha pàirt de lus coltach ri ball-bodhaig duine, bha daoine a’ smaoinichadh gun robh an lus a’ dèanamh leigheas air tinneas air a’ bhall-bhodhaig. Anns an t-seann leabhar *The Gaelic Names of Plants* le Iain Camshron (ochd ceud deug, ochdad ’s a trì) seo na sgrìobh e mu Lus nan Cnapan: “..from the resemblance of its roots to tumours ... it was esteemed a remedy for all scrofulous diseases.” Bha Lus nan Cnapan, *Scrophularia nodosa*, na leigheas airson tinneas air a bheil *scrofula* ann am Beurla. Ann an *scrofula* (no tinneas an rìgh ann an Gàidhlig) bidh cnapan air amhaich an duine a tha tinn.

Uill, seo mo smuain. Tha *farach* a’ ciallachadh cnap. Mar sin, bha *farach-dubh* is *farach-donn* aig cuid air Lus nan Cnapan. Bha Lus nan Cnapan na leigheas airson tinneas an rìgh – tinneas anns an robh cnapan a’ nochdadh air an amhaich. Ma tha smuain agaibh fhèin air sin, nach cuir sibh fios thugam?