

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 270 (which corresponds to Litir 574). Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

The Rev Alexander Pope was a minister in Reay in Caithness. That was in the eighteenth century. He collected Gaelic oral tradition in Caithness. That was around 1739.

He collected The Lay of Diarmad. He got that from an old man. The old man was always taking his bonnet off when he was singing The Lay of Diarmad. One day, Mr Pope went to his house. The old man started to sing. The minister got up. He put his bonnet on the old man. The old man stopped. He refused to sing any more with his bonnet on his head.

The minister allowed the old man to take his bonnet off. The old man sang well. Mr Pope asked him why he was not singing with his bonnet on. The old man said he was showing respect to the hero, Diarmad.

There are 85 lines in the poem. The poem tells how Diarmad killed the wild boar. That was to prove to Fionn MacCumhail that he was worthy of having Gràinne as his wife.

I know three places in Scotland

Bha An t-Urr Alexander Pope na mhinistear ann am Meagrath ann an Gallaibh. Chruinnich e beul-aithris Ghàidhlig ann an Gallaibh. Bha sin timcheall seachd ceud deug, trithead 's a naoi (1739).

Chruinnich e *Duan Diarmaid*. Fhuair e sin bho bhodach. Bha am bodach an-còmhnaidh a' toirt a bhonaid dheth nuair a bha a' gabhail Duan Diarmaid. Latha a bha seo, chaidh Mgr Pope don taigh aige. Thòisich am bodach air seinn. Dh'èirich am ministear. Chuir e a bhonaid air a' bhodach. Sguir am bodach. Dhiùlt e tuilleadh a ghabhail le a bhonaid air a cheann.

Leig am ministear leis a' bhodach a bhonaid a chur dheth. Sheinn am bodach gu math. Dh'fhaighnich Mgr Pope carson nach robh e a' seinn le a bhonaid air. Thuirt am bodach gun robh e a' toirt urram don ghaisgeach, Diarmad.

Tha ochdad 's a còig loidhnichean anns an duan. Tha an duan ag innse mar a mharbh Diarmad an torc nimhe. Bha sin airson dearbhadh do Fhionn MacCumhail gun robh e airidh air Gràinne a bhith aige mar bhean-chèile.

'S aithne dhomh trì àiteachan ann

where this story is based. That's in Glenshee, near Oban and on Ben Loyal in The Mackay Country [N Sutherland]. Of those three places, it's Ben Loyal that is closest to Reay. People see Ben Loyal from Reay on a good day. But the poem that Mr Pope collected in Caithness takes place in Glenshee.

There are ten Fingalian stories in Alexander Pope's Caithnessian collection. And he has one story I haven't seen elsewhere – The Lay of Learmon. It comes from the mouth of Ossian. Ossian is the son of Fionn. He is lamenting how his father's kingdom lost in a battle. That was against the Norsemen.

Learmon was on Fionn's side. A fleet appeared from Scandinavia. But Learmon didn't fight. The Norsemen defeated the Gaels. Do you reckon that story might remember something that really happened. Perhaps in Caithness itself?

an Alba far a bheil an stòiridh seo stèidhichte. Tha sin ann an Gleann Sìdh, faisg air an Òban agus air Beinn Laghail ann an Dùthaich MhicAoidh. De na trì àiteachan sin, 's e Beinn Laghail as fhaisge air Meaghrath. Bidh daoine a' faicinn Beinn Laghail à Meaghrath air latha math. Ach tha an duan a chruinnich Mgr Pope ann an Gallaibh a' gabhail àite ann an Gleann Sìdh.

Tha deich sgeulachdan Fèinne anns a' chruinneachadh Ghallach aig Alexander Pope. Agus tha aon stòiridh aige nach fhaca mi ann an àite sam bith eile – Duan Learmoin. Tha e a' tighinn bho bheul Oisein. 'S e Oisean mac Fhinn. Tha e a' caoidh mar a chaill rìoghachd athar ann an cath. Bha sin an aghaidh nan Lochlannach.

Bha Learmon air taobh Fhinn. Nochd cabhlach mòr à Lochlann. Ach cha do rinn Learmon sabaid. Thug na Lochlannaich buaidh air na Gàidheil. Saoil an robh an sgeulachd sin a' cuimhneachadh rudeigin a thachair ann an dha-rìribh? 'S dòcha ann an Gallaibh fhèin?