

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 308 (which corresponds to Litir 612). Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.macleon@bbc.co.uk.

The Thistle of Scotland is a famous plant of virtues, Neat plant of the prickly tufts which are provenly hard; A magnificent emblem of my beautiful beloved land, Often its fame kindled a bonfire in my cheek.

Do you recognise that? Here is the version in Scottish English: *the thistle o' Scotland was famous of auld, Wi' its toorie sae snod and its bristles sae bauld; 'Tis the badge o' my country, it's aye dear tae me; And the thocht o' them baith brings the licht tae my ee.*

For a long time, I didn't know it was a Gaelic song. But it is. The Gaelic came first. The English version was a translation. It's the bard, Evan MacColl who wrote the song. He was from Argyll. He lived [was alive] in the 19th Century. Malcolm MacFarlane made the translation into English.

I've seen [saw] two titles for the song – Thistle of Scotland and Emblem of Scotland. But what title did the author himself have? Well I found it recently. It was in the book Clàrsach nam Beann,

'S e Fòghnan na h-Alba lus ainmeil nam buadh, Lus grinn nan dos calgach thug dearbh air bhith cruaidh; Seann suaicheantas mòrail tìr bhòidheach mo luaidh, 'S tric dh'fhadaich a dheagh chliù teine-èibhinn nam ghruaidh.

A bheil sibh ag aithneachadh sin? Seo an dreach ann am Beurla na h-Alba: *O, the thistle o' Scotland was famous of auld, Wi' its toorie sae snod and its bristles sae bauld; 'Tis the badge o' my country, it's aye dear tae me; And the thocht o' them baith brings the licht tae my ee.*

Airson ùine mhòr, cha robh fios agam gur e òran Gàidhlig a bha ann. Ach 's e. Thàinig a' Ghàidhlig an toiseach. Bha an dreach Beurla na eadar-theangachadh. 'S e am bàrd Eòghann MacColla a sgrìobh an t-òran. Bha esan à Earra-Ghàidheal. Bha e beò anns an naoidheamh linn deug. Rinn Calum MacPhàrlain an t-eadar-theangachadh gu Beurla.

Chunnaic mi dà thiotal airson an dàin – *Fòghnan na h-Alba* agus *Suaicheantas na h-Alba*. Ach dè an tiotal a bha aig an ùghdar fhèin? Uill, fhuair mi lorg air o chionn ghoirid. Bha e anns an leabhar *Clàrsach nam*

that was published in 1836. And the song's title was The Thistle – Emblem of Scotland. Both things are in the name!

Evan MacColl was born and raised on the shore of Loch Fyne near Furnace. That's south of Inverarary. Next week I'll tell you about his life. But today, I'll leave you with the final verse of Thistle of Scotland. Here is the English first: My blessings be yours! Is there Scotsman ava, Wad stan' by and see ony harm on ye fa'? Is there gentle or semple what lives in our land, Wad refuse to drink a health to the thistle so grand?

And the Gaelic that MacColl wrote originally: My blessing on it forever! Who the Gael or Lowlander, Wouldn't defend it to the death? Who, low or high and who listens to my song, Wouldn't drink with me its success from full quaichs?

Beann, a chaidh fhoillseachadh ann an ochd ceud deug, trithead 's a sia (1836). Agus b' e tìotal an dàin Am Foghannan – Suaicheantas na h-Alba. Tha an dà rud anns an ainm!

Rugadh is thogadh Eòghann MacColla air cladach Loch Fìne, faisg air an Fhùirneis. Tha sin deas air Inbhir Aora. An ath-sheachdain innsidh mi dhuibh mu a bheatha. Ach an-diugh, fàgaidh mi sibh leis an rann mu dheireadh de dh'Fhòghnan na h-Alba. Seo a' Bheurla an toiseach: My blessings be yours! Is there Scotsman ava, Wad stan' by and see ony harm on ye fa'? Is there gentle or semple what lives in our land, Wad refuse to drink a health to the thistle so grand?

Agus a' Ghàidhlig a sgrìobh MacColla bho thùs: Mo bheannachd gu bràth air! Cia 'n Gàidheal no 'n Gall, Nach seasadh gu bàs e, ga theàrnadh bho chall? Cò, ìosal no uasal, bheir cluas do mo dhàn, Nach òladh leam "Buaidh leis" bho chuachannan làn?