

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 309 (which corresponds to Litir 613). Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I was telling you last week about the song The Thistle of Scotland. It was the Loch Fyne bard, Evan MacColl, that wrote it. I was in the parish in which he was born recently. There is a memorial to him at Kenmore, on the shore of Loch Fyne.

MacColl was born at Kenmore in 1808. The memorial was erected for him in 1930. It was the clan chief of the Campbells, the Duke of Argyll, that unveiled it.

Evan was involved in agriculture and fishing when he was young. But he had a talent for writing. He was writing both in Gaelic and English. In the thirties he got a collection of his Gaelic work published under the title Clàrsach nam Beann. He had the nickname "Clàrsair nam Beann" [harpist of the mountains].

Evan's mother was from Cowal. Evan liked that area on the far side of Loch Fyne. Some people are of the opinion that "In Praise of the River Ruel" – in Cowal – is the best poem he wrote.

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh an t-seachdain sa chaidh mun òran *Fòghnan na h-Alba*. 'S e bàrd Loch Fìne, Eòghann MacColla, a sgrìobh e. Bha mi anns an sgìre san do rugadh e o chionn ghoirid. Tha carragh-cuimhne ann dha air a' Cheann Mhòr, no *Kenmore*, air cladaich Loch Fìne.

Rugadh MacColla air a' Cheann Mhòr ann an ochd ceud deug 's a h-ochd (1808). Chaidh an carragh-cuimhne a chur suas dha ann an naoi ceud deug is trithead (1930). 'S e Mac Cailein Mòr, Diùc Earra-Ghàidheal, a dh'fhoillsich e.

'S ann ri obair-fearainn agus iasgach a bha Eòghann nuair a bha e òg. Ach bha tàlant aige airson sgrìobhadh. Bha e a' sgrìobhadh an dà chuid ann an Gàidhlig is Beurla. Anns na tritheadan fhuair e cruinneachadh dhen stuth Ghàidhlig aige ann an clò fon tiotal *Clàrsach nam Beann*. Bha am frith-ainm air – "Clàrsair nam Beann".

Bha màthair Eòghainn à Comhghall. Bha Eòghann measail air an sgìre sin air taobh thall Loch Fìne. Tha cuid dhen bheachd gur e *Moladh Abhainn Ruaile* – ann an Comhghall – an dàn as fheàrr a sgrìobh e.

Evan's family left to live in Canada in 1831. But Evan remained in Britain. He went to work in Liverpool as a clerk in the customs office. He stayed there until 1850.

Then he went to visit his relatives in Canada. Work was offered to him in the customs service in Kingston, Ontario. He accepted the work. He remained in Canada. He reached a good age. He died in 1898.

I'll finish the Litir with a verse from "In Praise of the River Ruel": Foster-mother of the trout, see them as they fight, with your snow-white, splashing shallows; Here they make leaps towards the sun – how I love the white-bellied little heroes! O fisher, be quick! There's one of them now under the shade of that bush, awaiting you; Send a fly his way without delay if you wish to see him in a plight that he won't enjoy.

Dh'fhalbh teaghlach Eòghainn a dh'fhuireach ann an Canada ann an ochd ceud deug, trithead 's a h-aon (1831). Ach dh'fhuirich Eòghann ann am Breatainn. Chaidh e a dh'obair ann an Liverpool mar chlaric ann an seirbheis na cusbainn. Dh'fhuirich e an sin gu ochd ceud deug is caogad (1850).

Chaidh e a thadhal an uair sin air na càirdean aige ann an Canada. Chaidh obair a thabhann dha ann an seirbheis na cusbainn ann an Kingston, Ontario. Ghabh e ris an obair. Dh'fhuirich e ann an Canada. Ràinig e deagh aois. Chaochail e ann an ochd ceud deug, naochad 's a h-ochd (1898).

Cuiridh mi crìoch air an Litir le rann bho *Moladh Abhainn Ruaile*: A mhùime nam breac, feuch siud iad a' gleac, Rid chaislichean sneachd-gheal, steallaireach; An seo iad a' leum an coinneamh na grèin – Mo cheist air na laochain gheal-tharrach! O, iasgair, bi clis! Siud fear dhiubh a-nis fo dhubhar a' phris ud feitheamh ort; Cuir cuileag gun dàil na rathad mas àill leat fhaicinn an càs nach laghach leis.