

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 319 (which corresponds to Litir 623). Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.macleon@bbc.co.uk.

I was recently in Glenlyon in Perthshire. That area is famous for history and oral tradition. And, according to oral tradition, the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, was born in the area. His father was in Scotland as part of the Roman army.

Fortingall is a beautiful village. It's not terribly long since the local people spoke Gaelic. There is a war memorial there. On it, there is this: To the Glory of God and in Memory of Those from Fortingall district who fell in the Great War 1914-1919. And the same thing in Gaelic: To the Glory of God and as a Memorial to Those who fell [who were] from Fortingall in the Great War 1914-1919.

What does the name Fairtichill or Fairtichill mean? I was reading a website. It was maintaining that it was "Feart nan Gall", the Stronghold of the Strangers. That's not correct. The name was recorded in 1240 as Forterkill. William [J] Watson was of the opinion that kill represents the Gaelic cill, or church. And he was of the opinion that fortair means a fort or castle. Thus,

Bha mi o chionn ghoirid ann an Gleann Lìomhann ann an Siorrachd Pheairt Tha an sgìre sin ainmeil airson eachdraidh agus beul-aithris. Agus, a rèir beul-aithris, rugadh an riaghladair Ròmanach, Pontius Pilat, anns an sgìre. Bha athair ann an Alba mar phàirt de dh'arm na Ròimhe.

'S e baile beag brèagha a tha ann am Fairtichill. Chan eil e uabhasach fada on a bha Gàidhlig aig muinntir an àite. Tha carragh-cuimhne cogaidh ann. Sgrìobhte air, tha seo: *To the Glory of God and in Memory of Those from Fortingall district who fell in the Great War 1914-1919.* Agus an aon rud ann an Gàidhlig: *Chum Glòir Dhè agus mar Chuimhneachan orra-sa a thuit à Fairtichill ann sa Chogadh Mhòr 1914-1919.*

Dè tha an t-ainm Fairtichill no Fairtichill a' ciallachadh? Bha mi a' leughadh làrach-lìn. Bha i a' cumail amach gur e "Feart nan Gall" a bha ann, the *Stronghold of the Strangers*. Chan eil sin ceart. Bha an t-ainm clàraichte ann an dà cheud dheug is ceathrad (1240) mar *Forterkill*. Bha Uilleam MacBhàtair dhen bheachd gu bheil *kill* a' riochdachadh na Gàidhlig *cill*, no *church*. Agus bha e dhen bheachd gu bheil *fortair* a' ciallachadh dùn no

Fairturchill means “the church of the fort”.

Perhaps you don’t recognise the Gaelic word fortair. But this is what Watson wrote about it: “I have learned recently from Mr Duncan Campbell ... a Glenlyon man, that one of the ancient round forts in Glenlyon is called in Gaelic an Fhortair [f-h-o-r-t-a-i-r]”. Watson thought that fortair was a Gaelic word that came from the Pictish language.

And was there a fort in Fairturchill. Indeed, there was. Beside the church there is Balnacraig. Above that there is a crag, as would be expected. There was a fort on the crag. Thus, “the church of the fort” makes sense.

Beside the church, there is one of the oldest trees in Europe. It is a yew tree. It is famous. In English, people call it the Fortingall Yew. We’ll take more of a look at it next week.

caisteal. Mar sin tha Fairturchill a’ ciallachadh “eaglais an dùin”.

’S dòcha nach eil sibh ag aithneachadh an fhacail Ghàidhlig fortair. Ach seo na sgrìobh MacBhàtair mu dheidhinn: “I have learned recently from Mr Duncan Campbell ... a Glenlyon man, that one of the ancient round forts in Glenlyon is called in Gaelic an Fhortair [f-h-o-r-t-a-i-r]”. Bha MacBhàtair a’ smaoinichadh gur e fortair facal Gàidhlig a thàinig bhon Chruithnis.

Agus an robh dùn ann am Fairturchill? Gu dearbh, bha. Ri taobh na h-eaglais tha Baile na Creige. Os cionn sin, tha creag, mar a bhiodh duil. Bha dùn air a’ chreig. Mar sin, tha “eaglais an dùin” a’ dèanamh ciall.

Ri taobh na h-eaglais, tha tè de na craobhan as sine anns an Roinn Eòrpa. ’S e craobh-iubhair a tha innte. Tha i ainmeil. Ann am Beurla, canaidh daoine the Fortingall Yew rithe. Bheir sinn sùil a bharrachd oirrese an-ath-sheachdain.