

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 320 (which corresponds to Litir 624). Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.macleam@bbc.co.uk.

I was telling you about Fortingall in Perthshire. The name means "the church of the fort". Was the place sacred to the pagans, before there was a church there? Some people think it was because there is a famous yew tree growing next to the church. It's very old. They say that it's the oldest tree in Europe. It's between two thousand and five thousand years old. It's not whole now. But it's still alive.

Do you know the Gaelic for Iona? That's Ì Chaluim Chille. Some scholars say that Ì means "the island of the yew tree". Perhaps Iona was famous to the pagan Celts. That was before Columba. That would explain why Columba selected Iona as a place for his monastery.

But why was the yew tree sacred to the pagans? Well, I'm not sure. Perhaps it was connected to the tree's age, and how it remains full of leaves through the winter. And yew trees live for a very long time.

Because they were sacred to the pagans, Christians took them over. They were then a symbol of Christianity. In Scotland people

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh mu Fhairtichill ann an Siorrachd Pheairt. Tha an t-ainm a' ciallachadh "eaglais an dùin". An robh an t-àite naomh do na pàganaich, mus robh eaglais ann? Tha cuid dhen bheachd gun robh oir tha craobh-iubhair ainmeil a' fàs ri taobh na h-eaglais. Tha i uabhasach sean. Tha iad ag ràdh gur e sin a' chraobh as sine anns an Roinn Eòrpa. Tha i eadar dà mhìle is còig mìle bliadhna a dh'aois. Chan eil i slàn a-nis. Ach tha i fhathast beò.

A bheil sibh eòlach air a' Ghàidhlig air Iona? 'S e sin Ì Chaluim Chille. Tha cuid de sgoilearan ag ràdh gu bheil Ì a' ciallachadh "Eilean nan Craobh-iubhair". 'S dòcha gun robh Eilean Ì ainmeil do na Ceiltich phàganach. Bha sin ro Chalum Cille. Bhiodh sin a' mìneachadh mar a thagh Calum Cille Eilean Ì mar àite airson a mhanachainn.

Ach carson a bha a' chraobh-iubhair naomh do na pàganaich? Uill, chan eil mi cinnteach. 'S dòcha gun robh e co-cheangailte ri aois na craoibhe, agus mar a dh'fhanas i làn duilleagan tron gheamhradh. Agus bidh craobhan-iubhair beò uabhasach fhèin fada.

Leis gun robh iad naomh do phàganaich, ghabh Crìosdaidhean thairis iad. Bha iad an uair sin mar shamhla de Chrìosdachd. Ann an Alba bha daoine a'

were planting yew trees beside churches. The trees were representing the resurrection of Christ. Some priests and ministers were preaching under yew trees. John Knox was famous for preaching under a yew tree!

There is other evidence that Fortingall was sacred to pagans. Close to the church, there is a burial mound. It's named "the cairn of the dead". The name comes from the fourteenth century. People were buried there. They died from the plague.

But the hillock was also famous at Halloween. The people were building a fire on the hillock. They were dancing around it. A yew tree, Halloween fires and a Christian church all pretty much on the same site. Fortingall represents strongly the heritage of the Gaels.

cur chraobhan-iubhair ri taobh eaglais-ean. Bha na craobhan a' samhlachadh aiseirigh Chrìosda. Bha cuid de shagartan is ministearan a' searmonachadh fo chraobhan-iubhair. Bha John Knox fhèin ainmeil airson a bhith a' searmonachadh fo chraobh-iubhair!

Tha fianais eile ann gun robh Fairturchill naomh do phàganaich. Faisg air an eaglais, tha barpa. 'S e an t-ainm a tha air Càrn nam Marbh. Tha an t-ainm a' tighinn bhon cheathramh linn deug. Chaidh daoine a thiodhlacadh ann. Fhuair iad bàs leis a' phlàigh.

Ach bha an tom ainmeil cuideachd aig an t-Samhain. Bha na daoine a' togail teine air an tom. Bha iad a' dannsadh timcheall air. Craobh-iubhair, teintean Samhna agus eaglais Chrìosdail uile cha mhòr air an aon làraich. Tha Fairturchill a' riochdachadh gu làidir dualchas nan Gàidheal.