

## **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 532 (which corresponds to Litir 836). Ruairidh can be contacted at [rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk](mailto:rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk).

*Dr Samuel Johnson and James MacPherson were venomous to each other. Johnson was keeping an oaken stick next to him. He was scared, he said, of James MacPherson, or 'Ossian MacPherson' as some called him. MacPherson wrote to Johnson, threatening him. It was literature that was behind the disagreement.*

*I was at a conference about MacPherson in the Spring. It was in Kingussie. I was asking of the experts who were present if MacPherson and Johnson ever met each other. They were living in London at the same time. But the experts didn't know.*

*I thought – wouldn't it be good if somebody wrote a play about a meeting between the pair? Would sparks fly? Or would the pair toast each other with a drink?!*

*Perhaps Samuel Johnson wasn't an easy-going guy. But it appears that he was correct about MacPherson's writings. The Scot was saying that what he published was created by the ancient bard, Ossian. But it appears that it was*

Bha an t-Oll. Somhairle MacIain agus Seumas MacMhuirich nimheil do chèile. Bha MacIain a' cumail bata daraich ri a thaobh. Bha an t-eagal air, bha e ag ràdh, ro Sheumas MacMhuirich, no 'Ossian MacPherson' mar a bha aig cuid air. Sgrìobh MacMhuirich gu MacIain, a' maoidheadh air. B' e litreachas a bha air cùl an eas-aonta.

Bha mi aig co-labhairt mu MhacMhuirich as t-Earrach. Bha i ann an Ceann a' Ghiùthsaidh. Bha mi a' faighneachd de na sàr-eòlaichean a bha an làthair an do thachair MacMhuirich is MacIain ri chèile riamh. Bha iad a' fuireach ann an Lunnainn aig an aon àm. Ach cha robh fios aig na h-eòlaichean.

Smaoinich mi – nach biodh e math nan sgrìobhadh cuideigin dealbh-chluich mu dheidhinn coinneamh eadar an dithis! Saoil am biodh i sradagach? No am biodh an dithis a' gabhail deoch-slàinte do chèile?!

'S dòcha nach e fear dòigheil a bha ann an Somhairle MacIain. Ach tha e coltach gun robh e ceart mu na sgrìobhaidhean aig MacMhuirich. Bha an t-Albannach ag ràdh gun robh na dh'fhoillsich e air a chruthachadh leis an t-seann bhàrd, Oisean. Ach tha e coltach

*MacPherson himself that wrote most of it, although it was based on oral tradition that was still alive on the lips of the people.*

*Johnson didn't hear that oral tradition when he was on tour in the Highlands in 1773. He was looking for manuscripts. But he didn't find any. When he returned home, he said that MacPherson was a fraudster. An enmity arose between the two men that lasted for twenty years. That was until Johnson died in 1794.*

*Isn't it strange what happened, then? The pair were almost put side-by-side after their death. They are buried close to each other in Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey. But perhaps it is fitting that MacPherson is there. Ossian's Bard, as it were in Oisean nam Bàrd [Poets' Corner].*

gur e MacMhuirich fhèin a sgrìobh a' chuid a bu mhotha dheth, ged a bha e stèidhichte air beul-aithris a bha fhathast beò air bilean an t-sluaigh.

Cha chuala MacIain a' bheul-aithris sin nuair a bha e air chuairt air a' Ghàidhealtachd ann an seachd ceud deug, seachdad 's a trì (1773). Bha e a' coimhead airson làmh-sgrìobhainnean. Ach cha d' fhuair e lorg air gin. Nuair a thill e dhachaigh, thuir e gur e slaightear a bha ann am MacMhuirich. Dh'èirich naimhdeas eadar an dithis a mhair fichead bliadhna. Bha sin gus an do chaochail MacIain ann an seachd ceud deug, naochad 's a ceithir (1794).

Nach annasach e mar a thachair, ma-thà? Bha an dithis air an cur cha mhòr còmhla an dèidh am bàis. Tha iad air an tiodhlacadh faisg air a chèile ann an Oisean nam Bàrd ann an Abaid Westminster. Ach 's dòcha gu bheil e iomchaidh gu bheil MacMhuirich an sin. Bàrd Oisein, mar gum bitheadh, ann an Oisean nam Bàrd.