

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 596 (which corresponds to Litir 900). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodgy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

William Elphinstone, the Bishop of Aberdeen, got permission from the Pope to establish a university in the town in 1495. He also got agreement from the King of Scotland, James IV. To begin with, it wasn't called 'The University of Aberdeen', but 'St Mary's College'. The name was changed to 'University and King's College'.

Elphinstone was highly regarded. It was easy for him to hire capable staff.

I want to return to Elphinstone's memorial. It is situated outside King's College Chapel. There is Gaelic writing on it.

Elphinstone died in 1514. His mortal remains were buried in the chapel. But his tomb disappeared at the time of the Reformation. Shortly before 1914, the leaders of the university decided to build a new memorial. It was the designer Henry Wilson that made it.

The project was delayed, however, because the Great War began. It was finished in 1931. The

Fhuair Uilleam Elphinstone, Easbaig Obar Dheathain, cead bhon Phàp airson oilthigh a stèidheachadh sa bhaile ann an ceithir ceud deug, naochad 's a còig (1495). Fhuair e cùmhnant cuideachd bho Rìgh na h-Alba, Seumas IV. An toiseach, chan e 'Oilthigh Obar Dheathain' a bha air, ach 'Colaiste Moire'. Chaidh an t-ainm atharrachadh gu 'Oilthigh agus Colaiste an Rìgh'.

Bha Elphinstone cliùiteach. Bha e furasta dha luchd-obrach comasach fhastadh.

Tha mi airson tilleadh don charragh-chuimhne aig Elphinstone. Tha e suidhichte taobh a-muigh Caibeal Cholaiste an Rìgh. Tha sgrìobhadh Gàidhlig air.

Chaochail Elphinstone ann an còig ceud deug is ceithir-deug (1514). Chaidh an dust aige a thiodhlacadh anns a' chaibeal. Ach chaidh an tuam aige à fianais aig àm an Ath-leasachaidh. Beagan ron bhliadhna naoi ceud deug is ceithir-deug (1914), chuir ceannardan an oilthigh romhpa carragh-cuimhne ùr a thogail. 'S e an dealbhadair Eanraig MacUilleim a rinn e.

Bha dàil air a' phròiseact, ge-tà, oir thòisich an Cogadh Mòr. 'S ann an naoi ceud deug, trithead 's a h-aon (1931)

memorial was put in King's College Chapel. But it was too big. After the Second [World] War, it was moved to the site where it is today.

For the rest of my account, I'm indebted to Colm Ó Baoill. Colm used to teach in the university's Celtic Department. He wrote about the matter in the periodical Gath.

The university began to teach Gaelic in 1916. It was John Fraser from Glenurquhart that was teaching it. He wrote two verses in old Gaelic for the memorial. Here is part of the first verse, but in old Gaelic: The resting place of our saintly teacher, one Elphinstone, scholar of the Gaels ...

Well now, did Elphinstone speak Gaelic? Or was there another reason for John Fraser to write that? I don't know. But I do know this – William Elphinstone was some guy.

a bha e deiseil. Chaidh an carragh-cuimhne a chur ann an Caibeal Cholaiste an Rìgh. Ach bha e ro mhòr. An dèidh an Dàrna Cogaidh, chaidh a ghluasad don làraich far a bheil e an-diugh.

Airson a' chòrr dhen chunntas agam, tha mi an comain Cholm Ó Baoill. Bha Colm uaireigin a' teagasg ann an Roinn na Ceilteis san oilthigh. Sgrìobh e mun chùis anns an iris Gath.

Thòisich an t-oilthigh air Gàidhlig a theagasg ann an naoi ceud deug is sia-deug (1916). 'S e fear Iain Friseal à Gleann Urchardain a bha ga teagasg. Sgrìobh esan dà rann ann an seann Ghàidhlig airson a' charraigh-chuimhne. Seo pàirt dhen chiad rann, ach ann an seann Ghàidhlig: *Àite-laighe ar n-oide naoimh, am fear Elphinstone, sgoilear nan Gàidheal ...*

Uill, a-nise, an robh Gàidhlig aig Elphinstone? No an robh adhbhar eile aig Iain Friseal airson sin a sgrìobhadh? Chan eil fhios a'm. Ach tha fhios a'm air seo – 's e duine air leth a bha ann an Uilleam Elphinstone.