

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 637 (which corresponds to Litir 941). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.macleam@bbc.co.uk.

Have you ever heard of the Kishorn Dwarfs? They were from Kishorn, a village between Applecross and Lochcarron in Wester Ross. In 1844-5, a small American guy came to Europe. He took on the name 'General Tom Thumb'. It's Phineas T Barnum that brought him over. Tom appeared in front of the Queen. Today, such a thing wouldn't happen. But things were different then.

Tom Thumb had just returned home when the Inverness Courier reported that there was a family of the same type in Kishorn. Duncan Finlayson and his wife, Catherine, had three children. They were all dwarfs – Finlay, John and Mary. They were born and raised in Tornapress at the base of Bealach nam Bò.

Duncan had died and the family was poor. People asked them to go south to be 'Highland Tom Thumbs'. Finlay, John and Mary agreed a contract with a certain William Mackenzie from near Beaulieu. Finlay, the eldest, was about twenty years of age. Mary was only fifteen.

An cuala sibh riamh mu Throichean Chiseorn? Bha iad à Ciseorn, baile beag eadar A' Chomraich agus Loch Carrann ann an Ros an Iar. Ann an ochd ceud deug, ceathrad 's a ceithir gu ceathrad 's a còig (1844-45), thàinig fear beag Ameireaganach don Roinn Eòrpa. Ghabh e an t-ainm air fhèin 'General Tom Thumb'. 'S e Phineas T Barnum a thug a-nall e. Nochd Tom air beulaibh na Banrigh. Anns an latha an-diugh, cha tachradh a leithid. Ach bha cùisean eadar-dhealaichte an uair sin.

Bha Tom Thumb dìreach air tilleadh dhachaigh nuair a dh'aithris Courier Inbhir Nis gun robh teaghlach dhen aon seòrsa a' fuireach ann an Ciseorn. Bha triùir chloinne aig Donnchadh Fionnlasdan agus a bhean, Catrìona. Bha iad uile nan troichean – Fionnladh, Iain agus Màiri. Rugadh is thogadh iad ann an Treamhar nam Preas aig bun Bealach nam Bò.

Bha Donnchadh air bàs fhaighinn agus bha an teaghlach bochd. Dh'iarr daoine orra dhol gu deas airson a bhith nan 'Highland Tom Thumbs'. Dh'aontaich Fionnladh, Iain agus Màiri cùmhnant bliadhna le fear, Uilleam MacCoinnich, à faisg air a' Mhanachainn. Bha Fionnladh, am fear a bu shine, mu fhichead bliadhna a dh'aois. Bha Màiri dìreach còig-deug.

They learned Gaelic dances and songs and they wore Highland garb. Mackenzie went with them to London. In May 1846, they appeared in front of the Queen. After that, they appeared in public in London. It cost two shillings to watch them. Audiences came in their droves. There was a picture of the 'Highland Dwarfs' in the London Illustrated News.

The three of them spent a year in London. They learned English there. They returned home. They were living in Courthill near Kishorn. Finlay – the last [survivor] – died around 1915.

When the Kishorn Dwarfs were famous, a report appeared in the Inverness Courier that several other Highland dwarfs were making for London in the same way. The report was but a falsehood – something that people today would call 'fake news'. There's nothing new under the sun!

Dh'ionnsaich iad dannsaidhean agus òrain Ghàidhlig agus bha trusgan Gàidhealach orra. Chaidh MacCoinnich cuide riutha gu ruige Lunnainn. Anns a' Chèitean ochd ceud deug, ceathrad 's a sia (1846) nochd iad air beulaibh na Banrigh. An dèidh sin, nochd iad gu poblach ann an Lunnainn. Chosg e dà thastan a choimhead orra. Thàinig an luchd-amhairc nan dròbhan. Bha dealbh de na '*Highland Dwarfs*' anns an *London Illustrated News*.

Chuir an triùir seachad bliadhna ann an Lunnainn. Dh'ionnsaich iad Beurla an sin. Thill iad dhachaigh. Bha iad a' fuireach air Cnoc a' Mhòid faisg air Ciseorn. Chaochail Fionnladh – am fear mu dheireadh – timcheall air naoi ceud deug is còig-deug (1915).

Nuair a bha Troichean Chiseoirn ainmeil, nochd aithris ann an Courier Inbhir Nis gun robh grunn troichean Gàidhealach eile a' dèanamh air Lunnainn anns an aon dòigh. Cha robh anns an aithris ach breug – rud ris an canadh daoine an-diugh '*fake news*'. Chan eil càil às ùr fon ghrèin!