

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 644 (which corresponds to Litir 948). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodgy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I was speaking about Iain Lom, the Keppoch bard. John was strongly against the union with England in 1707. In his song 'song against the union', he criticizes the nobles who supported the union, particularly the Earf of Brahan. Here is a verse from the song:

Earl of Brahan from Seaforth, you'll never have peace as long as you live, may there be a hard hunt in your pursuit, anywhere in Europe, but if I had my choice, certainly I'd melt gold for you, [and inject it] into the shell of your skull, till it reached your boot(s). John had strong opinions. He wasn't slow [lazy] in proving his hatred!

I was telling you that John was buried in Cladh Cille Choirill. In 1951, Calum Maclean, the folklore collector, met Iain Beag, a MacDonald from Lochaber who was a poet. Iain was coming from mass in the Cille Choirill church on a cold, snowy day. Calum spoke to him in Gaelic and that opened an amazing door to him. He collected more than five hundred pieces of oral tradition from Iain. Some of them were connected to Iain Lom. Here is one of them.

Bha mi a' bruidhinn mu Iain Lom, bàrd na Ceapaich. Bha Iain gu làidir an aghaidh an aonaidh le Sasainn ann an seachd ceud deug 's a seachd (1707). Anns an òran aige 'Òran an Aghaidh an Aonaidh', tha e a' càineadh nan uaislean a thug taic don aonadh, gu seachd àraidh Iarla Bhrathainn. Seo rann bhon òran:

Iarla Bhrathainn à Sìophort, Cha bhi sìothshaimh ri d' bheò dhut, Gum bi ortsa cruaidh fhaghaid, Thall a-staigh dhen Roinn Eòrpa; Ach nam faighinn mo roghainn, 'S dearbh gu leaghainn an t-òr dhut, A-staigh air faochaig do chlaiginn, Gus an cas e do bhòtainn. Bha beachdan làidir aig Iain. Cha robh e leisg ann a bhith a' dearbhadh a chuid gràin!

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh gun robh Iain air a thiodhlacadh ann an Cladh Cille Choirill. Ann an naoi ceud deug, caogad 's a h-aon (1951), thachair Calum MacGill-Eain, am fear-cruinneachaidh beul-aithris, ri Iain Beag, Dòmhnallach à Loch Abar a bha na bhàrd. Bha Iain a' tighinn a-mach à aifreann ann an Eaglais Cille Choirill air latha fuar, sneachdach. Bhruidhinn Calum ris ann an Gàidhlig agus dh'fhosgail sin doras iongantach dha. Chruinnich e còrr is còig ceud pìos de bheul-aithris bho Iain. Bha feadhainn dhiubh co-cheangailte ri Iain Lom. Seo fear dhiubh.

On the day of Iain Lom's burial, there was a poet from Glencoe present. He was another MacDonald, Angus son of red-haired Alexander. A man from Keppoch – one Archibald of Keppoch – spoke to him after the funeral. Angus gave him this poem:

I was today in Tom Aingeal, and I saw the end of my kinsman, arrow [yew] of the poets, king of the bards, God, let his soul be in peace, you hated [Queen] Mary, you hated [King] William, you hated all the descendants of Diarmad [the Campbells], all who were not royal. You'd tell them without asking them, the love of the lion [MacDonalds], the hatred of the boar [Campbells], in the grave where lies your body, may God forgive you, you were wickedly vengeful.

It's not a praise song! But perhaps it suited John's own style of writing.

Air latha tiodhlacaidh Iain Luim, bha bàrd à Gleanna Comhann an làthair. B' esan Dòmhnallach eile, Aonghas Alasdair Ruaidh. Bhruidhinn fear às a' Cheapaich ris – fear Gilleasbu' na Ceapaich – an dèidh an tiodhlacaidh. Thug Aonghas an dàn seo dha:

Bha mi 'n-diugh 'n Tom Aingeal, 'S chunna mi crìoch air m' fhear-cinnidh, Iubhair nam bàrd, Rìgh nam Filidh, A Dhia, a dhèanamh sìth ri d' anam; B' fhuath leat Màiri, b' fhuath leat Uilleam, B' fhuath leat Sìol Dhiarmaid uile; A h-uile neach nach biodh rìoghail. Dh'innseadh tu dhaibh e gun iarraidh, Gaol an leòmhainn 's fuath an tuirc, Anns an uaigh sa bheil do chorp, Dhia thoirt maitheanas dhut, Bha thu dìoghaltach anns an olc.

Chan e òran molaidh a tha ann!
Ach 's dòcha gun robh e a' tighinn ris an stoidhle sgrìobhaidh aig Iain fhèin.