

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 733 (which corresponds to Litir 1,037). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.macleam@bbc.co.uk.

I want to tell you about the famous freebooter, James MacPherson. He was the man who created Cumha Mhic a' Phearsain or, in English, MacPherson's Lament. He was born in the year 1675. He was both renowned and infamous in the north-east for being a freebooter.

James was put to death on the gibbet. Among the charges against him was 'being an Egyptian'. It didn't mean 'somebody belonging to Egypt' but 'Gipsy'. Perhaps it's 'traveller' we'd say today.

James was an illegitimate son of a laird from Badenoch – Duncan MacPherson from Invereshie, next to Loch Insh. Duncan met a beautiful young woman at a wedding. She, according to oral tradition, was a Gipsy. She gave birth to a son. Duncan accepted that he was the boy's father.

James grew to be strong and handsome. He was skilful with a sword. He was also a terrific fiddler, and a singer.

James was involved in robbery in towns like Elgin, Forres and Keith. But he wasn't involved in violence.

Tha mi airson innse dhuibh mun cheatharnach ainmeil, Seumas Mac a' Phearsain. B' esan am fear a chruthaich Cumha Mhic a' Phearsain no, ann am Beurla, MacPherson's Lament. Rugadh e sa bhliadhna sia ceud deug, seachdad 's a còig (1675). Bha e an dà chuid cliùiteach agus mì-chliùiteach anns an ear-thuath airson a bhith na cheatharnach.

Chaidh Seumas a chur gu bàs air a' chroich. Am measg nan casaidean na aghaidh, bha 'being an Egyptian'. Cha robhar a' ciallachadh 'Èiphiteach' ach 'Siopsach'. 'S dòcha gur e 'neach-siubhail' a chanamaid an-diugh.

Bha Seumas na mhac-dìolain aig uachdaran à Bàideanach – Donnchadh Mac a' Phearsain à Inbhir Fhèisidh, taobh Loch Ìnnse. Thachair Donnchadh ri boireannach òg brèagha aig banais. Bha ise, a rèir beul-aithris, na Siopsach. Rugadh leanabh-gille dhi. Ghabh Donnchadh ris gum b' esan athair a' ghille.

Dh'fhàs Seumas gu bhith làidir, eireachdail. Bha e sgileil le claidheamh. Bha e cuideachd na fhìdhlear air leth, agus na sheinneadair.

Bha Seumas ri mèirle ann am bailtean mar Eilginn, Farrais agus Baile Chè. Ach cha robh e ri fòirneart. Cha robh

He wasn't harming widows or the poor.

However, a great enmity grew up between James and the lairds in Morayshire, Banffshire and Aberdeenshire. One time, James was caught. He was in Aberdeenshire. The authorities set up a beautiful woman to catch him. He had a weakness for women. This woman asked James to meet her to listen to fiddle music. He walked into a trap. He was captured by law officers.

James was in prison in Aberdeen. But the young woman reconsidered what she had done. She spoke to one Peter Brown who was a famous robber. He sent intelligence to Donald MacPherson, James's cousin, in Badenoch. They put together a rescue party and made for Aberdeen.

They broke into the prison. While they were freeing James, a commotion started outside the prison. One man tried to keep James in the prison. But he got free, as we'll see next week.

e a' dèanamh cron air bantraich no daoine bochda.

Ge-tà, dh'èirich droch naimhdeas eadar Seumas agus na h-uachdarain ann an Siorrachdan Mhoireibh, Bhanbh agus Obar Dheathain. Aon turas, chaidh Seumas a ghlacadh. Bha e ann an Siorrachd Obar Dheathain. Chuir na h-ùghdarrasan boireannach brèagha air dòigh airson a ghlacadh. Bha laigse aige a thaobh nam ban. Dh'iarr an tè seo air Seumas coinneachadh rithe airson èisteachd ri ceòl na fìdhle. Choisich e a-steach do ribe. Chaidh a chur an grèim le oifigearan lagha.

Bha Seumas sa phrìosan ann an Obar Dheathain. Ach ghabh am boireannach òg dàrna beachd air na rinn i. Bhruidhinn i ri fear Pàdraig MacIlleDhuinn a bha na mhèirleach ainmeil. Chuir esan fios gu Dòmhnall Mac a' Phearsain, co-ogha Sheumais, ann am Bàideanach. Chuir iad buidheann saoraidh air dòigh agus rinn iad air Obar Dheathain.

Bhris iad a-steach don phrìosan. Fhad 's a bha iad a' saoradh Sheumais, thòisich ùpraid taobh a-muigh a' phrìosain. Dh'fheuch aon duine ri Seumas a chumail sa phrìosan. Ach fhuair e mu sgaoil mar a chhì sinn an-ath-sheachdain.