

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 779 (which corresponds to Litir 1,083). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I was telling you about old customs in the parish of Petty and Ardersier. In the New Statistical Account of Scotland, there is an account of weddings in that area. Schoolchildren would put a barrier in front of the main door.

To get in, the bridegroom would have to give fourpence to the children to buy a new football. If he wasn't willing to give the money, he would have to kick the old football. Where? Over the roof of the church! If he didn't do that, one of the lads would be permitted to take his shoes from him. And the children would then allow the people into the church.

They had another custom that was unusual. When there was a funeral, the people would run to the church. That was including even those carrying the coffin. Often, the carriers would fall when they were carrying the coffin.

That practice was famous in the other parishes around Petty. They were calling it 'the Petty Step'.

When the Rev. John Grant was writing his account in the middle of

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh mu sheann chleachdaidhean ann an sgìre Pheitidh is Àird nan Saor. Ann an Nua-chunntas Staitistigeach na h-Alba, tha cunntas ann mu bhainnsean anns an sgìre sin. Bhiodh clann-sgoile a' cur bacadh air beulaibh an dorais mhòir.

Airson faighinn a-steach dh'fheumadh fear na bainnse ceithir sgillinn a thoirt don chloinn airson ball-coise ùr a cheannach. Mura robh e deònach an t-airgead a thoirt seachad, dh'fheumadh e an seann bhall-coise a bhreabadh. Càite? Thairis air mullaich na h-eaglaise! Mura dèanadh e sin, bhiodh cead aig fear de na gillean a bhrògan a thoirt bhuaithe. Agus leigeadh a' chlann na daoine a-steach don eaglais an uair sin.

Bha cleachdadh eile aca a bha annasach. Nuair a bha tiodhlacadh ann, bhiodh na daoine a' ruith don eaglais. Bha sin a' gabhail a-steach eadhon luchd-giùlain na ciste. Gu tric, bhiodh an luchd-giùlain a' tuiteam fhad 's a bha iad a' giùlan na ciste.

Bha an cleachdadh sin ainmeil anns na sgìrean eile mun chuairt air Peitidh. Bha iad a' gabhail *Ceum Pheitidh* 'the Petty step' air.

Nuair a bha an t-Urramach Iain Grandd a' sgrìobhadh a chunntais ann am

the nineteenth century, the Petty Step had gone out of existence. The people of Petty, according to the minister, were just as slow and mannerly at funerals as the people in other parishes. However, a few years before that, there was a funeral for a woman who was reputed to be a witch. Her name was 'the wife of Cameron of the peas'. At her funeral, some of the lads did the Petty Step.

I learned another thing about that area. People were very familiar with a plant called 'Patrick's quaich'- Plantago major. But that wasn't their own name for the plant. They were calling it slàn-lus (ie healing plant). In other areas, slàn-lus stands for the ribwort plantain. Anyway, the people of Petty would use cuach Phàdraig – or slàn-lus – for healing wounds. It was, therefore, worthy of the name 'healing plant'.

meadhan an naoidheimh linn deug, bha Ceum Pheitidh air a dhol à bith. Bha muinntir Pheitidh, a rèir a' mhinisteir, a cheart cho mall is modhail aig tiodhlacaidhean 's a bha daoine ann am paraistean eile. Ge-tà, beagan bhliadhnaichean roimhe sin, bha tiodhlacadh aig boireannach aig an robh cliù mar bhana-bhuidseach. 'S e an t-ainm a bha oirre *Bean Chamshronach nam Peasaireach*. Aig a tiodhlacadh, rinn cuid de na balaich Ceum Pheitidh.

Dh'ionnsaich mi rudeigin eile mun sgìre sin. Bha daoine gu math eòlach air lus air a bheil *cuach Phàdraig* no *greater plantain* – *Plantago major*. Ach chan e sin an t-ainm a bha aca fhèin air an lus. Bha iad a' gabhail *slàn-lus* air. Ann an sgìrean eile, tha *slàn-lus* a' seasamh airson an *ribwort plantain*, *Plantago lanceolata*. Co-dhiù, bhiodh muinntir Pheitidh a' cur *cuach Phàdraig* – no *slàn-lus* – gu feum airson lotan a shlànachadh. Bha e airidh, ma-thà, air an ainm 'slàn-lus'.