

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 798 (which corresponds to Litir 1,102). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

St. Merchard is the patron saint of Glenmoriston, near Loch Ness. In English, [he is called] St. Merchard or St. Irchard. Our ancestors had the practice of putting 'mo' in front of a saint's name. Mo Eirheard changed to Meirheard. The Gaels of Glenmoriston were pronouncing it as 'Meirhead'.

He was born and brought up near Aberdeen in the area of Kincardine [O'Neil]. One day, according to oral tradition, he and two others were spreading the gospel in Strathglass.

There was a white cow there. Each day, it was standing near a tree, looking at it. It wasn't eating grass. Despite that, it wasn't hungry.

Merchard dug in the soil at the base of the tree. He found three bells. They looked brand-new.

Merchard kept a bell for himself. He gave the other two to his companions. He asked them to leave, each man on his own route. 'When the bell rings by itself a third time,' he said, 'build a church there.'

'S e Naomh Meirheard an naomh sònraichte ann an Gleann Moireasdan, taobh Loch Nis. Ann am Beurla, St. Merchard no St. Irchard. Bha cleachdadh aig ar sinnsearan 'mo' a chur air beulaibh ainm naomh. Dh'atharraich Mo Eirheard gu Meirheard. Bha Gàidheil Ghleann Moireasdan ga fhuaimneachadh mar 'Meirhead'.

Rugadh is thogadh e faisg air Obar Dheathain ann an sgìre Chinn Chàrdainn. Latha a bha seo, a rèir beul-aithris, bha e fhèin agus dithis eile a' sgaoileadh an t-soisgeil ann an Srath Ghlais.

Bha bò bhàn ann. Gach latha, bha i na seasamh faisg air craobh, a' coimhead oirre. Cha robh i ag ithe feur. A dh'aindeoin sin, cha robh an t-acras oirre.

Chladhaich Meirheard anns an ùir aig bonn na craoibhe. Lorg e trì clagan. Bha coltas ùr-nodha orra.

Chùm Meirheard clag dha fhèin. Thug e na dhà eile do a chompanaich. Dh'iarr e orra falbh, gach duine air an rathad aige fhèin. 'Nuair a sheirmeas an clag leis fhèin treas turas,' thuirt e, 'togaibh eaglais an sin.'

The first man went to the east. The bell rang three times. The final time, he was in Glen Convinth, south of Beauly. There is an old church and graveyard there still.

The second man went west. When the bell rang a third time, he was in Broadford on the Isle of Skye.

Merchard went south. He was on a hilltop above Glenmoriston when his bell rang the first time. The local people called that mountain Suidhe Meirheard 'Merchard's seat'. Today, it's just An Suidhe 'the seat' that's on the maps, or as people around Loch Ness say, 'An Suidh'.

Merchard reached Glenmoriston. He stopped at a spring. The bell rang a second time. He didn't go far, and the bell rang again. Merchard built a church there. People call the place Clachan Meirheard. There is nothing there now, except an old graveyard.

As we'll see next week, the bell was famous down the centuries. From time to time, it would still ring by itself.

Dh'fhalbh a' chiad duine chun na h-àirde an ear. Sheirm an clag trì tursan. An turas mu dheireadh, bha e ann an Gleann a' Chonfhadhaich, deas air a' Mhanachainn. Tha seann eaglais is cladh an sin fhathast.

Dh'fhalbh an dàrna fear chun na h-àirde an iar. Nuair a sheirm an clag aigesan treas turas, bha e anns an Àth Leathann san Eilean Sgitheanach.

Dh'fhalbh Meirheard chun na h-àirde a deas. Bha e air mullach os cionn Ghleann Moireasdan nuair a sheirm an clag aige a' chiad turas. Chuir muinntir an àite an t-ainm air a' bheinn ud Suidhe Meirheard. Anns an latha an-diugh, 's e dìreach An Suidhe a tha air na mapaichean, no mar a chanas daoine timcheall Loch Nis, 'An Suidh'.

Ràinig Meirheard Gleann Moireasdan. Stad e aig fuaran. Sheirm an clag dàrna turas. Cha deach e fada, agus sheirm an clag a-rithist. Thog Meirheard eaglais ann. Canaidh daoine Clachan Meirheard ris an àite. Chan eil ann a-nise ach seann chladh.

Mar a chì sinn an-ath-sheachdain, bha an clag ainmeil thar nan linntean. Bho àm gu àm, bhiodh e fhathast a' seirm leis fhèin.