

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 834 (which corresponds to Litir 1,138). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodgy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I was telling you about the Beltane Festival. In Carmina Gadelica, Alexander Carmichael tells us about the fires that people were building on hilltops at that time of the year. People called them 'need-fires.'

As part of the ceremony, the need-fire was divided into two halves. Then people and cattle were put between the 'two Beltane fires'. That was to 'purify' them.

When he was in Lewis in 1873, Carmichael heard a proverb from an old man. Bu dorra dhòmhsa sin a dhèanamh dhut na dhol eadar dà theine mhòr Bheail. It would be more difficult for me to do that for you than to pass between the two great fires of Beall. Bu dorra dhòmhsa sin a dhèanamh dhut na dhol eadar dà theine mhòr Bheail.

People also had the phrase – 'between two Beltanes'. In olden times, it meant a year – the time between Beltane and the next Beltane. However, the meaning of the phrase changed after the changing of the calendar. Then it meant the first fortnight in May, between Beltane and Beltane Old

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh mu Fhèill na Bealltainn. Ann an Carmina Gadelica, tha Alasdair MacIlleMhìcheil ag innse dhuinn mu na teintean a bha daoine a' togail air mullaichean chnoc aig an àm sin dhen bhliadhna. 'S e teintean-èiginn a chanadh daoine riutha.

Mar fhàirt dhen deas-ghnàth, bha an teine-èiginn air a roinn na dhà leth. An uair sin, bha daoine agus crodh air an cur eadar 'dà theine Bhealltainn'. Bha sin airson an dèanamh 'fiorghlan'.

Nuair a bha e ann an Leòdhas ann an ochd ceud deug, seachdad 's a trì (1873), chuala MacIlleMhìcheil seanfhacal mun chùis aig bodach: *Bu dorra dhòmhsa sin a dhèanamh dhut na dhol eadar dà theine mhòr Bheail. It would be more difficult for me to do that for you than to pass between the two great fires of Beall. Bu dorra dhòmhsa sin a dhèanamh dhut na dhol eadar dà theine mhòr Bheail.*

Bha an abairt aig daoine cuideachd – eadar dà Bhealltainn. O shean, bha i a' ciallachadh bliadhna – an t-àm eadar a' Bhealltainn agus an ath Bhealltainn. Ge-tà, dh'atharraich ciall na h-abairt an dèidh don mhìosachan atharrachadh. Bha e an uair sin a' ciallachadh a' chiad cheala-deug dhen Chèitean, eadar a' Bhealltainn agus a' Bhealltainn dhen t-seann nòs. 'S e àm math

Style. It's a good time for planting between the two Beltanes. I mean by that – planting vegetables.

The cuckoo is strongly connected with Beltane in the imagination of the Gaels. There is a proverb: On the lucky day of Beltane, the cuckoo emerges from its winter home. But there is another bird that got its name in connection to Beltane. That's the 'Beltane-bird' or whimbrel in English. That bird becomes obvious at that time of the year.

Another 'bird' is also connected with this festival. That's glaisean cumhach na Bealltainn – the mournful wee bird of Beltane. This is not a real bird, however. It's a somewhat cold wind that blows in the middle of May. Glaisean cumhach na Bealltainn.

a th' ann a bhith a' cur eadar an dà Bhealltainn. Tha mi a' ciallachadh le sin a bhith a' cur glasraich.

Tha a' chuthag ceangailte gu mòr ris a' Bhealltainn ann am mac-meanmna nan Gàidheal. Tha seanfhacal ann: *Latha Buidhe Bealltainn, thig a' chuthag às taigh geamhraidh.* Ach tha eun eile ann a fhuair ainm Gàidhlig ann an co-cheangal ris a' Bealltainn. 'S e sin Eun-Bealltainn no *whimbrel* ann am Beurla. Bidh an t-eun sin a' tighinn am follais aig an àm sin dhen bhliadhna.

Tha 'eun' eile ceangailte ris an fhèill seo cuideachd. 'S e sin *glaisean cumhach na Bealltainn – the mournful wee bird of Beltane.* Chan e seo eun ann an dha-rìribh, ge-tà. 'S e gaoth rudeigin fuar a tha ann a bhios a' sèideadh ann am meadhan a' Chèitein. Glaisean cumhach na Bealltainn.