

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 940 (which corresponds to Litir 1,244). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

The other day, I was reading an old report from the famous newspaper, Times of London. It appeared in the paper in January 1786. It grabbed my attention, because it was about a Gaelic dictionary. There was a controversy about it.

The dictionary was published – in two volumes – six years before that. It was one of the first Gaelic dictionaries. The title of Book 1 is ‘A Galic and English Dictionary containing all the words in the SCOTCH and IRISH dialects of the CELTIC, that could be collected from the VOICE, and Old Books and MSS’. Galic is spelled ‘G-A-L-I-C.’

The editor of the dictionary was the Reverend William Shaw. He was born on the Isle of Arran in 1749. He attended The University of Glasgow. After that, he went to London. He was among a group of gentlemen in London who were interested in literature. Among members of the group was the famous lexicographer, An t-Oll. Somhairle MacIain. You will know him better as Dr Samuel Johnson.

The dictionary is not the first book that William Shaw wrote. He also wrote ‘An Analysis of the Galic

An latha eile, bha mi a’ leughadh seann aithris on phàipear-naidheachd ainmeil, Tìm Lunnainn. Nochd e sa phàipear anns an Fhaoilleach seachd ceud deug, ochdad ’s a sia (1786). Thog e m’ aire, a chionn ’s gun robh e mu dheidhinn faclair Gàidhlig. Bha connspaid ann mu dheidhinn.

Bha am faclair air fhoillseachadh – ann an dà phàirt – sia bliadhna roimhe sin. B’ e fear de na ciad fhaclairean Gàidhlig. ’S e an tiotal a tha air Leabhar a h-Aon dheth ‘A Galic and English Dictionary containing all the words in the SCOTCH and IRISH dialects of the CELTIC, that could be collected from the VOICE, and Old Books and MSS’. Tha Galic air a litreachadh ‘G-A-L-I-C.’

B’ e deasaiche an fhaclair an t-Urramach Uilleam Seathach. Rugadh e ann an Eilean Arrainn ann an seachd ceud deug, ceathrad ’s a naoi (1749). Bha e ann an Oilthigh Ghlaschu. An dèidh sin, chaidh e a Lunnainn. Bha e am measg buidheann de dhaoine-uaile ann an Lunnainn aig an robh ùidh ann an litreachas. Am measg buill na buidhne, bha am faclairiche ainmeil, an t-Oll. Somhairle MacIain. Bidh sibh nas eòlaiche air mar Dr Samuel Johnson.

Chan e am faclair a’ chiad leabhar a sgrìobh Uilleam Seathach. Sgrìobh e cuideachd ‘An Analysis of the Galic

<p><i>Language'. That book is a sort of grammar.</i></p> <p><i>His analysis of the language is not exactly as we have it today. He names six noun cases, for example. Today, we recognise four.</i></p> <p><i>Among other things, he has clisgearan – that's the Gaelic for 'interjections'. For example: Grief: och! och! mo chreach! 'my ruin!' mo thruaidh! 'my misery!'; Derision: mo nàir ort! 'fy on you!'; Fatigue: heich ho! And he has examples of Gaelic literature. There is a translation to Gaelic of the famous poem Messiah by Alexander Pope.</i></p> <p><i>Samuel Johnson has a bad reputation in the Highlands because he wrote rather nasty things about the Gaelic language. But William Shaw got help and encouragement from Johnson to make his dictionary. More on the dictionary – and on the controversy about it – next week.</i></p>	<p><i>Language'. 'S e nàdar de ghràmar a tha anns an leabhar sin.</i></p> <p>Chan eil an anailis aige air a' chànan buileach mar a th' againn an-diugh. Tha e ag ainmeachadh sia tuisealan, mar eisimpleir. An-diugh, tha sinn ag aithneachadh ceithir.</p> <p>Am measg eile, tha clisgearan aige – sin a' Ghàidhlig air <i>interjections</i>. Mar eisimpleir: <i>Grief</i>: och! och! mo chreach! 'my ruin!' mo thruaidh! 'my misery!'; <i>Derision</i>: mo nàir ort! 'fy on you!'; <i>Fatigue</i>: heich ho! Agus tha eisimpleirean aige de litreachas Gàidhlig. Tha eadar-theangachadh gu Gàidhlig ann dhen dàn ainmeil <i>Messiah</i> le Alexander Pope.</p> <p>Tha droch chliù aig Somhairle MacIain air a' Ghàidhealtachd oir sgrìobh e rudan car nimheil mun Ghàidhlig. Ach fhuair Uilleam Seathach taic agus brosnachadh bho Mhaclain am faclair Gàidhlig aige a dhèanamh. Tuilleadh air an fhaclair – agus air a' chonnspaid mu dheidhinn – an-ath-sheachdain.</p>
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