

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 1,068 (which corresponds to Litir 1,372). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

What is the Gaelic for 'slate'? Well, it's sglèat that most people say. Sglèat gives us other words, such as sglèatach 'made of slate' agus sglèatair 'a slater'.

The slate industry was very big in North Wales. I noticed that it was the word llech that they have for slate in Welsh. Spelt L-L-E-C-H. That is related to our word leac. Leac means 'flagstone, flat stone, slab'. Leac-teine – hearthstone. Leac an dorais – doorstep.

But does leac ever mean 'slate'? Well, yes. According to Dwelly's dictionary, it means a 'slate to write on'. Schoolchildren were at one time writing on a leac with chalk.

What about slates that are so common on roofs of houses? Did people ever call them 'leac'? Well, they did in Wester Ross. That information comes from the book A Hundred Years in the Highlands by Osgood MacKenzie.

MacKenzie was a landlord in the Gairloch area. He spoke Gaelic. His family owned Flowerdale House as an estate house. In Gaelic it's An Taigh Dìge that people would – and

Dè a' Ghàidhlig a tha air slate? Uill, 's e sglèat a chanas a' chuid mhòr. Tha sglèat a' toirt dhuinn fhaclan eile, leithid sglèatach 'made of slate' agus sglèatair 'a slater'.

Bha gnìomhachas na sglèata gu math mòr ann an ceann a tuath na Cuimrigh. Mhothaich mi gur e am facal llech a tha aca airson sglèat ann an Cuimris. Air a litreachadh L-L-E-C-H. Tha sin càirdeach don fhacal againne leac. Tha leac a' ciallachadh 'flagstone, flat stone, slab'. Leac-teine – hearthstone. Leac an dorais – doorstep.

Ach a bheil leac uair sam bith a' ciallachadh 'slate'? Uill, tha. A rèir faclair Dwelly, tha e a' ciallachadh 'slate to write on'. Bha clann-sgoile uaireigin a' sgrìobhadh air leac le cailc.

Dè mu dheidhinn sglèatan a tha cho cumanta air mullaichean taighe? An robh daoine riamh a' gabhail 'leac' orra? Uill, bha ann an Ros an Iar. Tha am fiosrachadh sin a' tighinn bhon leabhar A Hundred Years in the Highlands le Osgood MacCoinnich.

Bha MacCoinnich na uachdaran ann an sgìre Gheàrrloch. Bha Gàidhlig aige. Bha Flowerdale House le a theaghlach mar taigh-oighreachd. Ann an Gàidhlig 's e an Taigh Dìge a chanadh – agus a chanas –

<i>still do – call Flowerdale House. The name means ‘Moat House’. There is no moat around the house today. But there was a moat around the old house that was there at one time.</i> <i>An ancestor of Osgood’s began to build the current house in 1738. He was the ‘lame landlord’, Sir Alexander MacKenzie. Osgood was his fionn-ogha. That means ‘his great-great grandson’. Fionn-ogha.</i> <i>They preserved the name of the old building – An Taigh Dìge – even though there was no longer a moat. But, to distinguish the old house from the new one, they added something to the name.</i> <i>In place of a thatched roof, the new house had a slate roof. And the name of the new house was Taigh Dìge nan Gorm-leac. Gorm-leac ‘a shiny black flat stone’ literally. It must have been – at that time anyway – that they called a slate gorm-leac in that locality.</i>	daoine ri <i>Flowerdale House</i>. Tha an t-ainm a’ ciallachadh ‘<i>Moat House</i>’. Chan eil dìg timcheall an taigh an-diugh. Ach bha dìg timcheall an t-seann taigh a bha ann roimhe. Thòisich sinnsear aig Osgood air an taigh a tha ann an-diugh a thogail ann an seachd ceud deug, trithead ’s a h-ochd (1738). B’ esan an ‘Tighearna Crùbach’, Sir Alasdair MacCoinnich. B’ e Osgood am fionn-ogha aige. Tha sin a’ ciallachadh ‘<i>his great-great grandson</i>.’ Fionn-ogha. Ghlèidh iad ainm an t-seann togalaich – An Taigh Dìge – eadhon ged nach robh dìg ann tuilleadh. Ach, airson sgaradh a dhèanamh eadar an seann taigh agus an taigh ùr, chuir iad pìos a bharrachd ris an ainm. An àite mullach tughaidh, bha mullach sglèatach air an taigh ùr. Agus b’ e ainm an taigh ùir – Taigh Dìge nan Gorm-leac. Gorm-leac ‘<i>a shiny black flat stone</i>’ gu litreachail. Feumaidh – aig an àm sin co-dhiù – gur e <i>gorm-leac</i> a bha aca anns an sgìre sin airson sglèat.
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