

**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 357 (which corresponds to Litir 661). Ruairidh can be contacted at [rodny.macleon@bbc.co.uk](mailto:rodny.macleon@bbc.co.uk).

*Blessed silverweed of spring, the seventh bread of the Gael. Blessed silverweed of spring, the seventh bread of the Gael. I've been speaking about the silverweed. The old Gaels were eating it. Sometimes they were growing it. The silverweed is the seventh bread. What are the other six?*

*In the book The Gaelic Otherworld, Ronald Black looks at that question. Here is his conclusion: oat-bread, barley-bread, rye-bread, pease-bread, wheaten bread and ginger bread. And the seventh one – silverweed bread.*

*In Carmina Gadelica, we are told that the people were grinding the dry root of the silverweed. They were making meal. They were making bread or porridge with the meal. Also they were eating the roots – raw or boiled or roasted.*

*The silverweed was important at time of famine. Some people in Uist kept themselves alive on silverweed and shellfish. That was when they were homeless at the time of the Clearances. In Tiree there was a bad year, shortly after the Battle of Culloden, known as The Year of the Silverweed. There wasn't enough*

*Brisgean beannaichte an Earraich, seachdamh aran a' Ghàidheil. Blessed silverweed of spring, the seventh bread of the Gael. Tha mi air a bhith a' bruidhinn mun bhrisgean. Bha na seann Ghàidheil ga ithe. Uaireannan, bha iad ga fhàs. 'S e am brisgean an seachdamh aran. Dè na sia eile a tha ann?*

Anns an leabhar *The Gaelic Otherworld*, tha Ragnall MacIlleDhuibh a' toirt sùil air a' cheist sin. Seo an co-dhùnadh aige: aran-coirce, aran-eòrna, aran-seagail, aran-peasrach, aran cruithneachd agus aran-milis. Agus an seachdamh fear – aran-brisgein.

Ann an *Carmina Gadelica*, thathar ag innse dhuinn gun robh na daoine a' bleith freumh tioram a' bhrisgein. Bha iad a' dèanamh min. Bha iad a' dèanamh aran no brochan leis a' mhin. Cuideachd, bha iad ag ithe nam freumhan – amh no air an goil no air an ròstadh.

Bha am brisgean cudromach aig àm gorta. Chùm cuid ann an Uibhist iad fhèin beò air brisgean is maorach. Bha sin nuair a bha iad gun dachaigh aig àm nam Fuadaichean. Ann an Tìrìodh bha droch bhliadhna ann, goirid às dèidh Blàr Chùil Lodair, air an robh *Bliadhna nam Brisgeanan*. Cha robh biadh gu leòr eile ann.

*other food.*

*I was telling you last week that I only knew one place-name in which there is the word brisgean. Well, I discovered an account of another one – the hollow of the silverweed near Staffin on Skye.*

*Did the old Gaels make use of the silverweed other than for food? Well, yes. Sometimes, people were putting the leaves inside their shoes as a lining. They were using the leaves also to dye cloth yellow.*

*In many countries, the silverweed was used as a cure for many things. Among them were cramp, fever and indigestion. And there is an interesting account from Tiree in the twentieth century. The old men were making a powder of the silverweed. They were putting the powder into their pipes. And they were smoking it! I'm not certain if it was healthy. I suspect it wasn't!*

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh an t-seachdain sa chaidh gun robh mi eòlach air aon ainm-àite anns a bheil am facal brisgean. Uill, lorg mi aithris air fear eile – *Lag nam Brisgean* faisg air Stafainn anns an Eilean Sgitheanach.

An robh na seann Ghàidheil a' cur a' bhrisgein gu feum eile, ach mar bhiadh? Uill, bha. Uaireannan, bha daoine a' cur nan duilleagan am broinn am bròg mar lìnig. Bha iad a' cleachdadh nan duilleagan cuideachd airson clò a dhathadh buidhe.

Ann am mòran dùthchannan, bha am brisgean air a chleachdadh mar leigheas airson iomadach rud. Nam measg bha an t-orc, fiabhras agus losgadh-bràghad. Agus tha aithris inntinneach ann à Tiriodh anns an fhicheadamh linn. Bha na bodaich a' dèanamh fùdar dhen bhrisgean. Bha iad a' cur an fhùdair do na pìoban aca. Agus bha iad ga smocadh! Chan eil mi cinnteach an robh e fallain. Tha amharas agam nach robh!