

Litir do Luchd-Ionnsachaidh le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

*A special programme, in the form of a “letter”, written and compiled by Roddy Maclean, and specifically aimed at Gaelic learners who already have some knowledge of the language. A short vocabulary and comments on points of grammar and figures of speech are included with the text. If you have comments, Roddy can be contacted by e-mail at roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk **

Tha ainm-àite air m’ aire an-dràsta. *Clachnaharry*. ’S e baile beag air leth a bh’ ann uaireigin, pìos beag a-mach à baile Inbhir Nis air an taobh an iar, air an rathad a tha a’ dol a dh’ionnsaigh na Manachainn. Bha e gu math Gaidhealach, fiù ’s anns an naoidheamh linn deug, nuair a bha Inbhir Nis a’ fàs na bu ghallda. Bha sgoil Ghàidhlig ann airson greis. Anise, ge-tà, tha e aig fìor iomall a’ bhaile mhòir.

Agus carson a tha e air m’ aire? Uill, air sàilleamh ’s gu bheil cuid a’ dèanamh dheth gur *Clach na h-Aire* an t-ainm a th’ air ann an Gàidhlig – gu robh clach ann a sin far am biodh muinntir an àite a’ cumail sùil air an rathad bhon taobh an iar, air eagal ’s gum biodh daoine a’ dèanamh air Inbhir Nis le droch rùn.

Tha sin ceàrr, ge-tà. Tha seann làmh-sgrìobhainn ag innse dhuinn gur e *Clach na h-Aithrigh* a bh’ air bho shean – dìreach mar a tha daoine ga ràdh ann am Beurla – *Clachnaharry*, agus gu robh sin a’ ciallachadh *The Stone of Repentance* no *Stone of Penance*. Tha am facal *aithreachas* againn fhathast, ach tha *aithrigh* air a dhol à bith, ged a tha e fhathast beò ann an Gàidhlig na h-Eireann. Ach bha e againn o shean agus ’s e sin a tha an t-ainm a’ ciallachadh. Tha dùil gu robh clach ann far am biodh peacaich a’ dol, airson aithreachas a ghabhail. Bha sin nuair a bha làmh-an-uachdair aig an Eaglais Chaitligich air a’ Ghàidhealtachd.

Tha Clach na h-Aithrigh air a bhith anns na naidheachdan air sgàth ’s gu robh an drochaid air an rathad mhòr anns a’ bhaile dùinte airson greis. Agus b’ fheudar do mhòran slighe fhada a ghabhail a-steach a dh’Inbhir Nis. Ach chaidh nàdar de cheann-bliadhna do Chlach na h-Aithrigh seachad o chionn ghoirid, an ìre mhath gun fhiosta don mhòr-shluagh. Oir, aig deireadh an Dàmhair, o chionn ceud is ceithir fichead bliadhna, chaidh Faoighteach a’ Chaledonian – an Caledonian Canal – fhosgladh gu h-oifigeil. Agus ’s e am baile a th’ aig ceann a tuath na faoightich – Clach na h-Aithrigh.

A bharrachd air sin, tha dà cheud bliadhna air a dhol seachad am-bliadhna bho sgrìobh an t-innleadair, Tòmas Telford, aithris don Riaghaltas, a’ moladh faoighteach a thogail – no a chladhach ’s dòcha – eadar Inbhir Nis (no Clach na h-Aithrigh airson a bhith firinneach) agus an Gearastan.

Rugadh Tòmas Telford ann an Siorrachd Dhùn Phris anns a’ bhliadhna seachd-deug, caogad ’s a seachd (1757). Bha athair na chìobair, agus chaochail e nuair a bha Tòmas dìreach na leanabh òg. Fhuair Tòmas foghlam anns an sgoil ionadail, agus fhuair e trèanadh an uairsin mar chlachair, mus deach e a dh’obair ann an Dùn Èideann.

Chuir e seachad tìde ann an Sasainn an uair sin, ann an Lunnainn, Portsmouth agus Shropshire. ’S ann nuair a bha e stèidhichte ann an Shropshire a fhuair e dreuchd airson a’ chiad turas mar innleadair ag obair air faoightich, agus choisinn e cliù dha fhèin leis na rinn e, agus cuideachd le phlana airson drochaid mhòr iarainn thar Abhainn Thames ann an Lunnainn. Cha deach an drochaid sin a thogail, ge-tà, oir bha i gu bhith ro chosgail.

Ach bha an Riaghaltas dhen bheachd gum b' esan an duine a' b' fheàrr airson dèiligeadh ri duilgheadas mòr air a' Ghaidhealtachd – cho truagh 's a bha na goireasan siubhail. Ann am beachd Thelford fhèin 's e a bh' ann fear de na pròiseactan 'a b' uaisle a bh' air a chur mu choinneamh rìoghachd sam bith a-riamh'. Bheir sinn sùil air a' phròiseact sin an ath-sheachdain.

* * *

Faclan na seachdain: Clach na h-Aithrigh: *Clachnaharry*; làmh-sgrìobhainn: *manuscript*; drochaid: *bridge*; Faoighteach a' Chaledonian: *the Caledonian Canal*; innleadair: *engineer*; a' cladhach: *dig*; firinneach: *truthful*; Siorrachd Dhùn Phris: *Dumfriesshire*; clachair: *stonemason*; goireasan-siubhail: *transport facilities*.

Abairtean na seachdain: tha X air m' aire: *X is on my mind*; an rathad a tha a' dol a dh'ionnsaigh na Manachainn: *the road that goes towards Beaulieu*; nuair a bha Inbhir Nis a' fàs na bu ghallda: *when Inverness was getting more 'gallda' – meaning less Gaelic in its character*; tha X air a dhol à bith: *X has disappeared*; bha e againn o shean: *we had it in the old days*; far am biodh peacaich a' dol: *where sinners would go*; airson aithreachas a ghabhail: *to repent*; nuair a bha làmh-an-uachdair aig an Eaglais Chaitligich: *when the Catholic Church had the upper hand*; tha X air a bhith anns na naidheachdan: *X has been in the news*; b' fheudar do mhòran slighe fhada a ghabhail: *many (people) had to take a long route*; chaidh nàdar de cheann-bliadhna seachad: *a sort of a birthday went past*; bha athair na chìobair: *his father was a shepherd*; chuir e seachad tìde ann an Sasainn: *he spent time in England*; choisinn e cliù dha fhèin: *he won himself a reputation*; le phlana airson drochaid mhòr iarainn thar Abhainn Thames: *with his plan for a large iron bridge over the River Thames*; fear de na pròiseactan a b' uaisle a bh' air a chur mu choinneamh rìoghachd sam bith a-riamh: *one of the most noble projects that was ever laid before a nation*.

Puing-ghràmar na seachdain: Cha deach an drochaid a thogail oir bha i gu bhith ro chosgail: *the bridge wasn't built because it was going to be too expensive*. Gu bhith is a useful expression, involving the infinitive of the verb to be, and it is generally employed in two contexts. Firstly it can refer to something which is going to happen in the future without too much immediacy – as it is in this case. Bha e gu bhith na pholasman ach dh'fhailnich air anns na deuchainnean aige (*he was going to be a policeman but he failed in his exams*); bha na h-Iudhaich gu bhith a' fulaing gu mòr ach 's e dìreach corra duine a thuig sin (*the Jews were going to suffer greatly but it was only the odd person who understood that*). It can also refer to being on the point of something – ie with an understanding of virtual immediacy eg tha iad gu bhith deiseil (*they are almost ready*); tha an coire gu bhith a' goil (*the kettle is on the point of boiling*).

Gnàths-cainnt na seachdain: air eagal 's gum biodh daoine a' dèanamh air Inbhir Nis le droch rùn: *for fear that people should (would) make for Inverness with evil intentions*. Eagal means 'fear' so air eagal 's gu ... means 'for fear that'; it might be more appropriately translated as 'in case' or 'lest' when no actual emotion of fear is involved eg thoir do mhiotagan leat, air eagal 's gum fàs i fuar feasgar (*take your gloves with you in case it gets cold this afternoon*).

* "*Litir do Luchd-Ionnsachaidh*" is funded by Comataidh Craolaidh Gàidhlig