

# *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](mailto:roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk) \**

A’ chiad turas a chaidh Marsaili Cheanadach-Fhriseal a dh’Eirisgeigh, ann an naoi-deug ’s a còig (1905), bha i a’ faireachdainn gu robh i air a sheòladh air ais ann an tìm, bhon fhicheadamh linn don t-seachdamh linn deug. Mar a dh’aithris mi anns na litrichean a dh’fhalbh, bha i air a bhith air muir is air tìr ann am mòran dùthchannan, ach cha do ghabh i tlachd bho ghin aca mar a ghabh i bho a cuairt a dh’Eirisgeigh. Bha i a’ cumail a-mach gu robh i car sàmhach, diùid na nàdar ach, nan canadh cuideigin am facal ‘Eirisgeigh’ rithe, gum biodh an clab oirre.

Cha b’ fhada gus an do thachair Marsaili ris an fhear a b’ ainmeil’ anns an eilean – an sagart, an t-Athair Urramach Ailean Dòmhnallach, no “Maighstir Ailein” mar a chanadh muinntir an àite ris. Bha esan cliùiteach air feadh an t-saoghail am measg dhaoine aig an robh ùidh ann am beul-aithris is bàrdachd is cultar nan Gaidheal. Gu mì-fhortanach do Mharsaili, agus do na h-uimhir eile a bha eòlach is measail air, chaochail Maighstir Ailein dìreach trì seachdainean as dèidh do Mharsaili dhol dhachaigh – leis a’ flu – aig aois ceathrad ’s a trì. Ach mhair a dhìleab fada as a dhèidh. Gu dearbh, tha i againn fhathast ann an saoghal nan Gaidheal.

’S iomadh duine air an deach Marsaili a chèilidh, agus thòisich i air fuinn nan òran a sgrìobhadh air pàipear. Bha i cho deidheil orra is gun deach i fiù ’s a-mach gu eathar a bha aig acair airson iarraidh air fear de na h-iasgairean na lìn a bha e a’ càradh a chur an dàrna taobh, agus òran a ghabhail dhi. Agus mhothaich i do dh’aon rud gu h-àraidh mu dheidhinn seinn nan eileanach – bha na guthan aig mòran aca uabhasach domhain.

Nuair a dh’fhalbh i, thug i leatha fuinn air pàipear ach cha robh i comasach air na faclan a sgrìobhadh – cha robh mòran Gàidhlig aice. Bha Maighstir Ailein air aontachadh taic a thoirt dhi, le bhith a’ cur na faclan ga h-ionnsaigh. Ach chaochail e mus robh cothrom aige.

Ann an naoi-deug ’s a seachd (1907), thill Marsaili a dh’Eirisgeigh agus thug i leatha inneal-clàraidh-fuaim air an robh *graphophone* – an seorsa inneil a bhiodh a’ cleachdadh siolandair-cèire. Cha robh e idir cho math ris an fheadhainn a th’ againn an là an-diugh, agus shaoileadh neach-èisteachd gu robh an tùchadh air an t-seinneadair. Air sailleamh sin, chanadh gillean òga Eirisgeigh ‘am bodach’ ris. Aig àmannan, leis gu robh an aimsir gu tric fliuch, chan obraicheadh an *graphophone* gu math.

An turas seo, chaidh Marsaili gu ruige Uibhist a Deas cuideachd, oir bha cuid de na daoine air an robh i eòlach ann an Eirisgeigh air a dhol a dh’fhuireach ann, leis nach robh fearann gu leòr dhaibh ann an Eirisgeigh fhèin. Agus chaidh i cuideachd a Bharraigh, an toiseach gu ceann a tuath an eilein. “Chan fhaigh sibh dad ann am Bàgh a’ Chaisteil,” thuirt cuideigin rithe anns an Òban. “Tha e ro ‘*sophisticated*’ a-nise...” Ach bha sin fada ceàrr.

Bha bùth aig fear Micheal MacNill air a’ chidhe ann am Bàgh a’ Chaisteil, agus chuir e fios a-mach do ghrunn seinneadairean thighinn cruinn còmhla anns a’ bhùth. B’ e sin, sgrìobh Marsaili, fear de na cèilidhean a b’ fheàrr a bh’ aice a-riamh, far an do

chruinnich i òrain. Bheir sinn sùil air agus air an obair a rinn Marsaili an co-bhuinn ris an Urramach Coinneach MacLeòid anns an Litir mu dheireadh mu a deidhinn, an ath-sheachdain.

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**Faclan na seachdaine:** sagart: *priest*; an t-Athair Urramach Ailean Dòmhnallach: *the Rev. Father Allan Macdonald*; Maighstir Ailein: *Father Allan (the local pronunciation is reflected in the spelling, ie Ailein rather than Ailean, in that the “l” and the final vowel are slenderised as would only be the case in the genitive case in most other places)*; domhain: *deep*; inneal-clàraidh-fuaim: *voice recording device*; siolandair-cèire: *wax cylinder*; Micheal MacNìll: *Micheal MacNeil (in other parts of the country, it is MacNèill, but in Barra it is MacNìll)*.

**Abairtean na seachdaine:** gu robh i air a sheòladh air ais ann an tìm: *that she had sailed back in time*; don t-seachdamh linn deug: *to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century*; cha do ghabh i tlachd bho ghin aca: *she didn’t derive pleasure from any of them*; gu robh i car sàmhach agus diùid na nàdar: *that she was somewhat quiet and shy in her nature*; gum biodh an clab oirre: *that she would be a blabbermouth*; do na h-uimhir eile: *to many others*; as dèidh do Mharsaili dhol dhachaigh: *after Marjory had gone home*; aig aois ceathrad ’s a trì: *at the age of 43*; mhair a dhìleab fada as a dhèidh: *his legacy survived long after him*; ’s iomadh duine air an deach X a chèilidh: *X visited many people*; na lìn a bha e a’ càradh a chur an dàrna taobh: *to put aside the nets he was mending*; thug i leatha fuinn air pàipear: *she took with her tunes on paper*; chaochail e mus robh cothrom aige: *he died before he had an opportunity*; ann am meadhan òrain: *in the middle of a song*; an co-bhuinn ris an Urramach Coinneach MacLeòid: *in co-operation with the Rev. Kenneth MacLeod*.

**Puing-ghràmar na seachdaine:** “Chan fhaigh sibh dad ann am Bàgh a’ Chaisteil,” thuirt cuideigin rithe anns an Òban: “you won’t get anything in Castlebay,” somebody said to her in Oban. Can you explain, from a grammatical point of view, why we say ann am Bàgh a’ Chaisteil but anns an Òban? It is all to do with the use of the article (of course there is only a definite article in Gaelic – the equivalent of “the” in English, but no indefinite article equivalent to “a”). In the case of Oban, there is an article in its Gaelic name – an t-Òban – which means we must say anns an Òban, with the article. In a phrase name form such as Bàgh a’ Chaisteil, we never put an article in front of the phrase, because it exists between the words as “a” (ie of the castle). This is the same as saying “bha mi ann an dorchadas na coille”, although we would say “bha mi anns an dorchadas”. Another example is “in Fort William” (the Gaelic for the town is an Gearasdan). It is either anns a’ Ghearasdan or, if you want to be specific about which gearasdan (garrison), you might say ann an Gearasdan Loch Abair (literally “in the Lochaber garrison” – there is also Gearasdan Deòrsa, Fort George, near Inverness). In the second example, the article is lost (ann an is an indefinite preposition) because of the genitive Loch Abair (of Lochaber).

**Gnàths-cainnt na seachdaine:** gu robh an tùchadh air an t-seinneadair: *that the singer was hoarse or wheezy*. Thàinig an tùchadh orm: *I grew hoarse (as with a throat infection or with too much singing or shouting)*.

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