

Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

*A special programme, in the form of a “letter”, designed for 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, Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.macleam@bbc.co.uk. This is Litir 581. Note that there is also a simplified version called *An Litir Bheag* which is likewise available on the BBC website. *Litir Bheag 277* corresponds to *Litir 581*.*

Bha mi riamh dhen bheachd gur e ainm snog a th’ ann an *Steòrnabhagh* no, ann am Beurla, *Stornoway*. Mar a tha mòran ainmean-àite ann an Leòdhais, buinidh e do dhualchas nan Lochlannach. Tha mi ’n dùil gur e *Stjórnarvágr* a chanadh na Lochlannaich ris, a’ ciallachadh *bàgh na stiùrach* no *bàgh an stiùiridh*. Chithear an aon seòrsa ainm air taobh an iar an eilein ann an *Càrlabhagh* no *Carloway*. ’S e *Karlavágr* an seann ainm air, a’ ciallachadh *bàgh Charl* no *Karl’s bay*.

Nise, bidh sibh uile a’ beachdachadh air a’ bhaile as motha anns na h-Eileanan an Iar, mar a tha mise, ach tha *Stornoway* eile ann an Alba. A bheil fios agaibh ca’ bheil e? Uill, ’s e loch a th’ ann. Ma choimheadas sibh air a’ mhapa de dh’Earra-Ghàidheal, chì sibh, ann an ceann a deas Chnapadail, *Loch Stornoway*, no *Loch Stornua* ann an Gàidhlig.

Dè bha anns a’ chumantas eadar an dà àite? Carson a chuir na maraichean Lochlannach an t-aon ainm air na dhà? Chan eil mi cinnteach agus, ma tha smuain agaibh, bu mhath leam a cluinntinn. Tha an loch-mara a tha a’ giùlain an ainm ann an Cnapadal dìreach gu siar air Loch an Tairbeirt an Iar – loch mòr a bhiodh cudromach mar phort. Am biodh na seòladairean a bha a’ dèanamh air Loch an Tairbeirt a’ stiùireadh a dh’ionnsaigh Loch Stornua nuair a thigeadh iad timcheall ceann a deas Ìle leis nach fhaiceadh iad Loch an Tairbeirt oir bha ceann a tuath Ghiogha anns an rathad orra?

Tha *Steòrnabhagh Leòdhais* nam cheann an-dràsta oir tha mi dìreach air a bhith ann. Bha mi cuideachd a’ leughadh leabhar ùr inntinneach mu eachdraidh a’ chaisteil – sin *Caisteal Leòdhais* ann an *Steòrnabhagh*. Tha an leabhar – *The Castles of the Lews* le *Peter Cunningham* – làn fiosrachaidh mu eachdraidh a’ bhaile. Agus dh’ionnsaich mi rud iongantach air duilleagan an leabhair mu *Steòrnabhagh*. ’S e sin gun do dh’fheuchadh ri ainm a’ bhaile atharrachadh. Saoilidh mise gu bheil *Stornoway* furasta ri ràdh agus ri litreachadh ann am Beurla. Agus tha e snasail air an teangaidh cuideachd. Ach, a rèir choltais, cha robh a h-uile duine sàsaichte leis.

Sgrìobh Fear-casaid a’ Chrùin ann an *Steòrnabhagh*, fear Tòmas Druimeanach, ann an ochd ceud deug, trithead ’s a ceithir (1834) don bhall-phàrlamaid Seumas Stiùbhart-MacCoinnich le moladh **gun cuirte** ainm ùr air a’ bhaile. Nise, tha fhios a’ m gur e litir Ghàidhlig a tha seo, ach saoilidh mi gun còrd e ribh criomag dhen litir a chluinntinn anns a’ Bheurla anns an deach a sgrìobhadh: “ Respected Sir ... In the first place I would suggest the propriety of changing the name of Stornoway, which has no meaning whatever so far as I can learn, and which to the ear of all Lowlanders sounds harsh, and indeed is

often pronounced “Stormaway” and gives strangers a wild idea of this country which it is undeserving thereof...”

Uill ... ceart gu leòr, 's dòcha ... ach bha beachd aig an Druimeanach air dè an t-ainm ùr a bu chòir a bhith air a' bhaile. Agus tha eagal orm gu feum sibh feitheamh chun na h-ath-sheachdain airson faighinn a-mach dè bh' ann. Ach, na gabhaibh dragh. 'S e Steòrnabhagh a bh' air, a th' air agus a bhitheas air!

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Faclan na Litreach: snog: *nice*; Steòrnabhagh: *Stornoway*; maraichean: *mariners*; Loch an Tairbeirt an Iar: *West Loch Tarbert*; seòladairean: *sailors*; sàsaichte: *happy, satisfied*; Fear-casaid a' Chrùin: *The Procurator Fiscal*; Tòmas Druimeanach: *Thomas Drummond*; Seumas Stiùbhart-MacCoinnich: *James Stewart-Mackenzie*.

Abairtean na Litreach: buinidh e do dhualchas nan Lochlannach: *it belongs to the heritage of the Norse*; bàgh na stiùrach no bàgh an stiùiridh: *the bay of the rudder or the bay of the steering/steerage*; ma choimheadas sibh air a' mhapa de dh'Earra-Ghàidheal: *if you look on the map of Argyll*; chì sibh, ann an ceann a deas Chnapadail: *you'll see, at the southern end of Knapdale*; an loch mara a tha a' giùlain an ainm: *the sea loch that carries the name*; a' stiùireadh a dh'ionnsaigh Loch Stornua: *steering towards Loch Stornoway*; nuair a thigeadh iad timcheall ceann a deas Ìle: *when they'd come around the south of Islay*; leis nach fhaiceadh iad: *as they wouldn't see*; bha ceann a tuath Ghiogha anns an rathad orra: *the northern end of Gigha was in their way*; tha e inntinneach a bhith a' meòrachadh air: *it's interesting to contemplate it*; gun do dh'fheuchadh ri ainm a' bhaile atharrachadh: *that an attempt was made to change the town's name*; furasta ri ràdh agus ri litreachadh: *easy to say and spell*; snasail air an teangaidh: *elegant on the tongue*; saoilidh mi gun còrdadh e ribh criomag dhen litir a chluinntinn: *I reckon you'd enjoy hearing a part of the letter*; dè an t-ainm ùr a bu chòir a bhith air a' bhaile: *what new name the town should have*.

Puing-chànain na Litreach: *A point about Old Norse this week. The reason for the naming of Stjórnarvágr isn't clear, although it's generally accepted that it refers to the procedure of steering or possibly to a rudder. Some have suggested that it refers to the manoeuvring that was required by vessels which docked or anchored in the original harbour. But would the same apply to Loch Stornoway in Knapdale? In the days of the longships, which lacked deep keels, might Norse mariners from further south (they ran the show as far south as the Isle of Man) which were plying the Minch on their way towards Cape Wrath (and Norway) have steered towards Stjórnarvágr, allowing the prevailing SW wind to drive the vessel NNE towards the Cape (what is known to sailors as “leeway”)? I'm here ignoring tidal effects as the Norse mariners would have been sure to have read and used the tides accurately. It's only speculation. Any thoughts from readers of a maritime bent?*

Gnathas-cainnt na Litreach: moladh gun cuirte ainm ùr air a' bhaile: *a recommendation that the town be renamed [that a new name be put on it]*.

Tha “Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh” air a maoinachadh le MG ALBA