

# 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.maclean@bbc.co.uk](mailto:rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk). This is Litir 597. Note that there is also a simplified version called An Litir Bheag which is likewise available on the BBC website. Litir Bheag 293 corresponds to Litir 597.*

Air a’ chiad shealladh, chan eil e follaiseach cò às a thàinig am facal a th’ againn airson “Christmas” – *Nollaig*. Tha a’ Bheurla soilleir gu leòr – *Christ’s Mass*. Ach Nollaig? Uill, ann an seann Ghàidhlig ’s e *Notlaic* a bh’ ann. Agus *Nadolig* ann an Cuimris. Bha fuaim “t” no “d” ann am meadhan an fhacail. Bha MacBheathain dhen bheachd gun do dh’èirich e à freumh Laidinn – *natalicia*, a’ ciallachadh “àm breith”. Tha sin a’ dèanamh ciall.

Tha sinn a’ dèanamh dheth an-diugh gur e an Nollaig an còigeamh latha fichead dhen Dùbhlachd, a’ riochdachadh latha-breith Ìosa Chrìosd. Ach, anns an t-seann aimsir, agus chan eil e cho fada sin bhuaipe, bha dà Nollaig ann – an *Nollaig Mhòr* agus an *Nollaig Bheag*. B’ e an Nollaig Mhòr an tè air a bheil sinn eòlach an-diugh. B’ e an Nollaig Bheag Latha na Bliadhn’ Ùire. Agus tha an Nollaig a’ nochdadh ann an grunn seanfhaclan. Seo eisimpleir:

*Cha robh samhradh riamh gun ghrian,  
Cha robh geamhradh riamh gun sneachd,  
Cha robh Nollaig Mhòr gun fheòil,  
No bean òg le deòin gun fhear.*

Uill, cha chan mi cus mun loidhne mu dheireadh! Ach tha e soilleir gum biodh daoine ag ithe feòil gu leòr aig àm na Nollaig, ged nach biodh a leithid pailt aig amannan eile dhen bhliadhna.

Thàinig mi tarsainn air seanfhacal eile mun Nollaig, agus tha e gu math inntinneach – *Nollaig an-diugh ’s Bealltainn a-màireach*. *Christmas today and May Day tomorrow*. Dè tha sin a’ ciallachadh?

Uill, bhiodh na seann daoine ag ràdh – nam biodh latha na Nollaig ann air, can, Diluain gum biodh Latha na Bealltainn, a bha a’ leantainn air, air Dimàirt, an làrna-mhàireach. Nollaig an-diugh ’s Bealltainn a-màireach. Uill, chuir mi sin fo dheuchainn, le bhith a’ toirt sùil air na beagan bhliadhnaichean a dh’fhalbh. An robh e fìor? Agus seo na lorg mi:

2006: Nollaig Diluain, Bealltainn Dimàirt. Glè mhath. Tha e a’ leantainn modail an t-seanfhacail. 2007: Nollaig Dimàirt, Bealltainn mmm Diardaoin. Cha do dh’obraich sin. 2008: Nollaig Diardaoin, Bealltainn Dihaoine. Glè mhath. 2009: Nollaig Dihaoine, Bealltainn Disathairne. Math dha-rìribh. 2010: Nollaig Disathairne, Bealltainn Didòmhnaich. Sgoinneil. Agus 2011: Nollaig Didòmhnaich, Bealltainn mmm Dimàirt. Uill, tha e ag obair anns a’ chuid as motha de bhliadhnaichean.

Ach tha pàtran eile ann. Gu math tric, taobh a-staigh na h-aon bhliadhna mìosachain, bidh Latha na Bealltainn agus Latha na Nollaig air an aon latha dhen t-seachdain. Eadar

2006 agus 2011, bha sin fìor a h-uile bliadhna. Saoil a bheil seanfhacal ann mu dheidhinn sin? Bealltainn an-diugh is Nollaig an-diugh cuideachd...?

Co-dhiù, bu mhath leam dùrachd Nollaig thraidiseanta a thoirt dhuibh uile:

**Guidheamaid buaidh is piseach oirbh,**

**Nur laighe 's èirigh slàn;**

**Ur taigh gun bhoinne snighe ann,**

**'S ur ciste-mhine làn.**

Nollaig Chridheil dhuibh uile.

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**Faclan na Litreach:** Nollaig: *Christmas*; Cuimris: *Welsh language*; àm breith: *time of birth*; Oidhche nam Bannagan: *the night of the cakes*; math dha-rìribh: *excellent*; sgoinneil: *fabulous*; pàtran: *pattern*.

**Abairtean na Litreach:** air a' chiad shealladh: *at [on the] first sight*; ann am meadhan an fhacail: *in the middle of the word*; bha MacBheathain dhen bheachd gun do dh'èirich e à freumh Laidinn: (*Alexr.*) *MacBain (a famous Gaelic scholar and etymologist) was of the opinion that it arose from a Latin root*; tha sinn a' dèanamh dheth an-diugh: *we reckon today*; an còigeamh latha fichead dhen Dùbhlachd: *the 25<sup>th</sup> of December*; a' riochdachadh latha-breith Ìosa Chrìosd: *representing the birth day of Jesus Christ*; anns an t-seann aimsir: *in the olden days*; agus chan eil e cho fada sin bhuaipe: *and it's not that long ago*; b' e an Nollaig Bheag Latha na Bliadhn' Ùire: *the Nollaig Bheag was New Year's Day*; airson a bhith ri spòrs is dibhearsain: *to be involved in fun and games*; cha robh samhradh riamh gun ghrian: *there was never a summer without sun*; gun sneachd: *without snow*; cha robh Nollaig Mhòr gun fheadail: *there was never a Christmas without meat*; no bean òg le deòin gun fhear: *nor a willing young woman without a man*; cha chan mi cus mun loidhne mu dheireadh: *I won't say too much about the last line*; tha e soilleir gum biodh daoine ag ithe fèidil gu leòr: *it's clear that people would be eating plenty of meat*; ged nach biodh a leithid pailt aig amannan eile: *although such a thing would not be plentiful at other times*; chuir mi sin fo dheuchainn: *I put that to the [under a] test*; a' toirt sùil air na beagan bhliadhnaichean a dh'fhalbh: *looking at the past few years*; taobh a-staigh na h-aon bhliadhna mìosachain: *inside the one calendar year*; Nollaig Chridheil dhuibh uile: *Merry Christmas to you all*.

**Puing-chànain na Litreach:** At the end of the Litir I gave you a traditional Christmas greeting. Here's the translation. Keep it and use it next year!: **Guidheamaid buaidh is piseach oirbh:** *let us wish you success and prosperity*; **Nur laighe 's èirigh slàn:** *sleeping and rising healthily*; **Ur taigh gun bhoinne snighe ann:** *your house without a drop of water oozing in (ie through a thatched roof)*; **'S ur ciste-mhine làn:** *and your meal chest full*. *What more could you want! Happy Christmas to all my readers and listeners.*

**Seanfhacal na Litreach:** Nollaig an-diugh 's Bealltainn a-màireach: *Christmas today and May Day tomorrow. This makes an observation – if Christmas day falls on, say, a Monday, the following May Day will fall on the next day of the week ie a Tuesday. But it clearly doesn't work in all years. However, I noticed another pattern – within the same calendar year, May Day and Christmas day fall on the same day of the week. Any comments from aficianados of the calendar?*

*Tha "Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh" air a maoinachadh le MG ALBA*