

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.macleon@bbc.co.uk. This is Litir 617. Note that there is also a simplified version called An Litir Bheag which is likewise available on the BBC website. Litir Bheag 313 corresponds to Litir 617.

'S e fear de na h-ainmean-àite a tha doirbh a thuigsinn ann an fìor cheann a tuath na h-Alba – Kinbrace ann an **Dìthreabh Chat**. 'S e a' Ghàidhlig a th' air *Ceann a' Bhràist* ach **dè is ciall dha?** Tha Iain Mac an Tàilleir, air an làraich-lìn air leth feumail aige*, ag ràdh, “This may be ‘the head of the upland’, including a form of *bràigh*, ‘upland’”.

Dh'fhaodadh sin a bhith ceart, ach thàinig mi tarsainn air mìneachadh eile airson tùs an ainm nuair a bha mi a' leughadh seann leabhar ainmeil o chionn ghoirid. 'S e an leabhar *Memorabilia Domestica: or Parish Life in the North of Scotland* leis an Urramach Dòmhnall Saigeach, no Donald Sage. Sgrìobh e an leabhar ann an ochd ceud deug is ceathrad (1840). Tha esan ag innse dhuinn gu bheil *Ceann a' Bhràist* a' faighinn ainm bho dhuine.

Seo an tuairisgeul aige: “Nuair a thig thu a-steach [don bhaile] bhon iar-thuath, laighidh do shùil air grunn chàrn ... Dhiubh sin, 's e am fear as motha tobhta caisteil a bha uaireigin na phrìomh àros, ann an **Siorrachd Chataibh**, airson ceann-cinnidh nan Gunnach, air an robh an tiotal “Crùn-fhear” ann an ceithir cheud deug, ochdad 's a naoi (1489). Bha am baran làidir seo de shliochd Amhlaidh à Ceann Dhunngain ann an Gallaibh, a bhuineadh o thùs do dh'Arcaibh, ach aig an robh prìomh chaisteal aig Halbury air costa Ghallaibh, agus, aig an àm a tha fon phrosbaig, a bh' air fearann fhaighinn bho Iarla Chat.”

'S e duine cudromach a bh' ann, oir bha fearann mòr aige agus bha dreuchd aige leis an riaghaltas. 'S e sin as coireach gun robh “Crùn-fhear” no “Crown-laird” air mar thiotal. Agus leis gun robh e cho uasal, bhiodh e a' giùlain bràiste mhòr airgid air a bhroilleach. Air sgàth sin, 's e “Am Bràisteach Mòr” a bhiodh daoine a' gabhail air – mar a sgrìobhas an Saigeach, “literally, ‘the dignity of the brooch’”. Agus, mar sin, chuireadh an t-ainm air a' chaisteal aige Ceann no Cinn a' Bhràist, ‘the seat of the dignitary of the brooch’. Ann am Beurla, Kinbrace.

Tha am ministear ag innse dhuinn rudeigin eile inntinneach mun Bhràisteach Mhòr, co-dhiù a rèir beul-aithris na sgìre. Feasgar ciùin samhraidh a bha seo, bha e sa chaisteal aige ann an Ceann a' Bhràist nuair a chuala e dùdach air a sheinn. Bha coigreach ann agus bha e a' sireadh cuid na h-oidhche. Bhiodh sin air a toirt seachad gun cheist aig an àm ud.

Leig an Gunnach na coigreach a-steach. Bha fear dhiubh gu math àrd agus rudeigin sean. B' esan an ceannard. Gun a bhith a' feòrachadh cò bh' ann, thug am Bràisteach Mòr cuireadh dha is do a chompanaich biadh a ghabhail còmhla riutha.

Nuair a bha an coigreach na shuidhe ri taobh a' Ghunnaich, thàinig dusan fear òg a-steach agus shuidh iad rin taobh. Bha gach fear dhiubh sia troighean a dh'àirde agus eireachdail.

“An iad seo do mhic?” dh'fhaighnich an srainnsear.

“S iad,” fhreagair am Bràisteach Mòr, “agus is beag an nàire a th' orm gur ann leamsa a tha iad.”

“Faodaidh tu a bhith moiteil asta,” ars an coigreach. Ach bha e an impis rudeigin a ràdh a chuireadh an dithis an ugannan a chèile, agus an cinnidhean leotha. Chì sinn dè bh' ann an-ath-sheachdain.

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Faclan na Litreach: Ceann a' Bhràist: *Kinbrace*; An t-Urramach Dòmhnall Saigeach: *Rev Donald Sage*; tuairisgeul: *description*; Iarla Chat: *The Earl of Sutherland*; uasal: *noble, of high station*; còigreach: *stranger*; a' feòrachadh: *asking*; cinnidhean: *clans, tribes*.

Abairtean na Litreach: a tha doirbh a thuigsinn: *which is difficult to understand*; fìor cheann a tuath: *the far north*; thàinig mi tarsainn air mìneachadh eile airson tùs an ainm: *I came across another explanation for the origin of the name*; laighidh do shùil air grunn chàrn: *a number of cairns meet the eye*; tobhta caisteil a bha uaireigin na phrìomh àros: *the remains of a castle, once the principal residence*; ceann-cinnidh nan Gunnach: *the chief of the Clan Gunn*; bha am baran làidir seo de shliochd Amhlaidh à Ceann Dhunngain ann an Gallaibh: *this potent baron, the lineal descendant of Olaf of Duncansby in Caithness*; a bhuineadh o thùs do dh'Arcaibh: *a native of Orkney*; a' giùlain bràiste mhòr airgid air a bhroilleach: *carrying a large silver brooch on his breast*; nuair a chuala e dùdach air a sheinn: *when he heard a bugle being sounded*; a' sireadh cuid na h-oidhche: *seeking a night's accommodation*; shuidh iad rin taobh: *they sat next to them*; bha gach fear dhiubh sia troighean a dh'àirde agus eireachdail: *each one of them was six feet tall and handsome*; an iad seo do mhic?: *are these your sons?*; is beag an nàire a th' orm gur ann leamsa a tha iad: *I'm not ashamed [to say] they're mine*; moiteil asta: *proud of them*; an impis rudeigin a ràdh a chuireadh an dithis an ugannan a chèile: *about to say something that would put the two men at loggerheads*.

Puing-chànain na Litreach: **Dìthreabh Chat:** “*the higher, less cultivated part of Sutherland*”. Dìthreabh might be translated as “*wilderness*” but it is not quite a wilderness as people do live there, even if they are thin on the ground. The Gaelic view of the county of Sutherland is very different from the English/Norse heritage (for a start it's at the north of the Gàidhealtachd!) It is divided into Machair Chat (the low coastal land in the east), Bràigh Chat (the upland country behind the machair), Dìthreabh Chat in the centre of the county, Dùthaich MhicAoidh in the north, Eadar-Dhà-Chaolas in the north-west, Asainte in the far west, and a division little known today – Fearann Coscraigh (“*Coscraich's land*”) between Bonar Bridge and Dornoch. Cataibh originally meant Machair Chat, Bràigh Chat and Dìthreabh Chat collectively, but it has also come to mean the modern county of Sutherland. To be clear, I called the modern county **Siorrachd Chataibh** in the Litir.

Gnàthas-cainnt na Litreach: dè is ciall dha?: *what does it mean?*

** Gheibhear grèim air làrach-lìn Iain Mhic an Tàilleir aig
www.scottish.parliament.uk/vli/language/gaelic/vl-trans.htm*

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