

Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

Allt nam Mèirleach (1)

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 646. Note that there is also a simplified version called An Litir Bheag which is likewise available on the BBC website. Litir Bheag 342 corresponds to Litir 646.

Nuair a bha mi ann an Gallaibh, ag obair le bun-sgoilearan air ainmean-àite, ghabh mi an cothrom a dhol gu làrach a bha mi airson fhaicinn fad ùine. Tha i dhà no thrì mìle gu siar air Inbhir Ùige, air bruach a tuath na h-aibhne. Tha an t-ainm a’ comharrachadh tachartas anns a’ bhliadhna sia ceud deug is ochdad (1680), agus tha e ann an Gàidhlig. Tha mi a’ bruidhinn air *Altmarlach* no *Allt nam Mèirleach*. Ged a tha an t-ainm sgriobhte mar *Altmarlach* air a’ mhapa, mhothaich mi gum bi cuid de mhuinntir an àite a’ cantainn “Altnamarlach” le “n” ann. Tha am fuaimneachadh sin uabhasach coltach ri fuaimneachadh na Gàidhlig.

Tha carragh-cuimhne anns an àite, a’ comharrachadh batail. Tha cuid ga thomhas mar am batail mu dheireadh eadar na fineachan ann an Alba. Choisich mi ann air feasgar fliuch. An toiseach bha e furasta gu leòr oir tha frith-rathad ann air am bi muinntir Inbhir Ùige a’ coiseachd len cuid chon. Ach, letheach-slighe don charragh-cuimhne, dh’fhalbh an ceum à fianais agus bha e garbh an uair sin – bog, fliuch agus làn luachair ’s a leithid.

Air aon taobh bha an abhainn – domhainn is sàmhach. Air an taobh eile, bha bruach garbh. ’S dòcha nach do dh’atharraich an t-àite cus bhon latha anns an Iuchar sia ceud deug is ochdad (1680) nuair a thàinig dà fheachd ri chèile an sin. Nam biodh tu ri taobh h-aibhne gun chomas snàimh, agus do nàmhaid air a’ bhruaich os do chionn, bhiodh tu ann an staing dha-rìribh.

Ann am meadhan an t-seachdamh linn deug, bha Seòras Mac na Ceàrdaich Chèis na Iarla Ghallaibh – an siathamh fear leis an tiotal sin. Bha fiachan mòra air agus bha trioblaidean aige le dithis uachdaran. Dh’iarr e air a’ Chomhairle Dhìomhair ann an Dùn Èideann taic a thoirt dha. Chuir iadsan Iain Glas, Caimbeulach a bha na oighre do dh’oighreachd Ghleann Urchaidh, gu ruige Gallaibh airson gnothaichean a rèiteach.

Chuala Iain Glas mu na fiachan aig Mac na Ceàrdaich agus thàinig an dithis gu aonta. Gheibheadh an Gallach mìle not gach bliadhna bhon Chaimbeulach **fhad ’s a bu bheò e**. Ach, nuair a gheibheadh e bàs, bhiodh Iain Glas a’ faighinn a thiotail agus oighreachd.

Chaochail Seòras ann an sia ceud deug, seachdad ’s a sia (1676). Fhuair Iain Glas, mar a bha dùil aige, an iarlachd agus gach rud na cois. Chan e sin a-mhàin ach phòs e banntrach Sheòrais a bharrachd. Bha gàirdeachas ann am Braghaid Albann, agus airgead a’ mhàil a’ dol a-mach à Gallaibh gu ruige taigh a’ Chaimbeulaich.

Ach cha robh Clann na Ceàrdaich toilichte idir. Bha iadsan dhen bheachd gun robh Iain Glas na fheall-duine agus gur ann gu eas-onarach a fhuair e a làmhan air oighreachd Sheòrais. Thog iad cùis-lagha ann an Dùn Èideann agus thug ceathrar dhen luchd-lagha a bu chliùitiche ann an Alba sùil oirre. Gu mì-fhortanach do na Gallaich, thug iad breith seachad ann am fàbhar Iain Ghlais. Agus an-ath-sheachdain chì sinn mar a thàinig e gu bhith gun robh batail fuilteach ann air bruaichean Abhainn Ùige aig Allt nam Mèirleach.

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Faclan na Litreach: Gallaibh: *Caithness*; bun-sgoilearan: *primary school children*; Inbhir Ùige: *Wick*; mèirleach: *robber, thief*; fuaimneachadh: *pronunciation*; carragh-cuimhne: *memorial stone*; frith-rathad: *path*; letheach-slighe: *halfway*; garbh: *rough*; nàmhaid: *enemy*; Seòras Mac na Ceàrdaich Chèis: *George Sinclair of Keiss*; Iarla Ghallaibh: *Earl of Caithness*; fiachan: *debts*; A' Chomhairle Dhìomhair: *The Privy Council*; Braghad Albann: *Breadalbane*; feall-duine: *deceiver*; gu h-eas-onarach: *dishonestly*.

Abairtean na Litreach: ghabh mi an cothrom a dhol gu làrach: *I took the opportunity to go to a site*; a bha mi airson fhaicinn fad ùine: *that I had wanted to see for a while*; am batail mu dheireadh eadar na fineachan: *the last battle between the clans*; a' coiseachd len cuid chon: *walking with their dogs*; dh'fhalbh an ceum à fianais: *the path disappeared*; làn luachair 's a leithid: *full of rushes and the like*; domhainn is sàmhach: *deep and silent*; bruach garbh: *a rough bank*; 's dòcha nach do dh'atharraich an t-àite cus: *perhaps the place hasn't changed much*; nuair a thàinig dà fheachd ri chèile: *when two forces came together*; gun chomas snàimh: *without the ability to swim*; bhiodh tu ann an staing dha-rìribh: *you'd be in a real predicament*; a bha na oighre do dh'oighreachd Ghleann Urchaidh: *who was the heir to the inheritance/estate of Glenorchy*; airson gnothaichean a rèiteach: *to sort matters out*; gheibheadh an Gallach: *the Caithnessian would receive*; nuair a gheibheadh e bàs: *when he died*; an iarlachd agus gach rud na cois: *the earldom and everything that went with it*; phòs e bantrach Sheòrais: *he married George's widow*; a bu chliùitiche: *most renowned*; ann am fàbhar X: *in X's favour*.

Puing-chànain na Litreach: *Although I've given Allt nam Mèirleach as the Gaelic form of Altmarlach, I wonder if it might have been Allt nam Mearlach – very close to the pronunciation I've heard native Weekers give. Mearlach is recorded as a dialectal form of mèirleach (although the form in Dùthaich MhicAoidh, the closest area with a living continuously spoken dialect, is mèirleach). Questions have been posed as to why, if Sinclair's army mostly spoke Caithness Scots, with the enemy (and hated) Campbells being Gaels, the site of such a disastrous battle (for the Gallaich) should be given a Gaelic name. The answer presumably lies in the language of those who lived in, and farmed, the immediate area. Altmarlach was close to the linguistic border between Gaelic and Scots speaking parts of Caithness at that time. If you have thoughts or evidence on the genesis of the name, I'd love to hear from you.*

Gnàthas-cainnt na Litreach: *fhad 's a bu bheò e: while he lived.*

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