

Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

Am Balaena

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 1,026. Note that there is also a simplified version called An Litir Bheag which is likewise available on the BBC website. Litir Bheag 722 corresponds to Litir 1,026.

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh mu Uilleam Speirs Brus – an t-Albannach a bha ainmeil airson a bhith a’ rannsachadh na h-Antartaig. Chaidh e don Chuan a Deas an toiseach ann an cabhlach de cheithir longan à Dùn Dè. Bha iad a’ coimhead airson fianais air cho pailt ’s a bha mucan-mara – a ghabhadh sealg – anns a’ chuan sin.

Am measg nan soithichean a chaidh ann, bha am *Balaena*. Chaidh òran a sgrìobhadh mu a deidhinn:

A noble fleet of whalers went sailing frae Dundee, all manned by British sailors to sail the ocean sea; on the west Atlantic passage none with her can compare, she’s the finest ship to make the trip, the Balaena, I declare.

Bhon òran, tuigidh sibh nach ann sa chuan a deas a bha am *Balaena* ag obair, co-dhiù aig toiseach gnothaich. Tha an t-sèist ag innse dhuinn ca’ robh i a’ dol: *With the wind upon her quarter, her engines running free, there’s nae another whaler a-sailing frae Dundee, can beat the old Balaena, there’s nae need to try her on, we will challenge a’ baith large an’ sma’ frae Dundee tae St John.*

’S e *St John* rubha – *Cape St John* – ann an Talamh an Èisg, a tha a-nise mar phàirt de Chanada.

Anns na seachdadan dhen naoidheamh linn deug, bha mu dheich soithichean ag obair a-mach à Dùn Dè, a’ sealg mhucan-mara anns na cuantan mu thuath. Bhiodh iad a’ fàgail a’ phuirt anns a’ Chèitean, agus a’ dèanamh air St John. Às a sin, bhiodh iad a’ seòladh gu tuath – gu Graonlainn agus ceann a tuath Chanada. Bhiodh iad a’ tilleadh a Dhùn Dè **mu thoiseach na Samhna**.

Tha aon rann dhen òran gu math inntinneach, oir tha e ag ainmeachadh soitheach eile a bha gu bhith ainmeil: *Bold Jackman cut his canvas and fairly raised his steam, and Captain Guy on Erin Boy was ploughing through the stream, and the noble Terra Nova, her boilers nearly burst, and still at the old whaling grounds, Balaena got there first.*

An *Terra Nova*. B’ e sin an soitheach a thug Raibeart Falcon Scott leis don Antartaig ann an naoi ceud deug ’s a deich (1910), nuair a chaochail e fhèin is feadhainn eile dhen phàrtaidh aige. B’ e sin an triall Breatannach dhan tug Comann Rìoghail a’ Chruinn-eòlais taic, seach a bhith a’ toirt taic do dh’Uilleam Speirs Brus agus an triall Albannach aige.

Ro dheireadh an naoidheamh linn deug, bha na sealgairean a’ mothachadh nach robh na mucan-mara cho pailt ’s a b’ àbhaist. ’S e sin a bu chuireach gun do sheòl an

cabhlach, anns an robh am *Balaena*, don Chuan a Deas ann an ochd ceud deug, naochad 's a dhà (1892), le Uilleam Speirs Brus air bòrd.

Ged nach robh iad uabhasach soirbheachail, lean feadhainn eile orra. Mu dheireadh thall, tràth anns an fhicheadamh linn, bha daoine dhen bheachd gun gabhadh gnìomhachas a stèidheachadh. Thog iad puirt ann an South Georgia. 'S **iomadh Gàidheal** a bha an sàs ann an sealg nam mucan-mara ann an South Georgia. Bheir sinn sùil air òran Gàidhlig a tha a' cuimhneachadh nan làithean sin anns an ath Litir.

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Faclan na Litreach: an t-sèist: *the chorus*; rubha: *point, peninsula, cape*; Talamh an Èisg: *Newfoundland*; soithichean: *vessels, ships*; rann: *verse*.

Abairtean na Litreach: Chaidh e don Chuan a Deas an toiseach ann an cabhlach de cheithir longan à Dùn Dè: *he went to the Southern Ocean in a fleet of four ships from Dundee*; airson fianais air cho pailt 's a bha mucan-mara – a ghabhadh sealg: *for evidence on how plentiful were whales – that could be hunted*; chaidh òran a sgrìobhadh mu a deidhinn: *a song was written about her*; tuigidh sibh nach ann sa chuan a deas a bha X ag obair, co-dhiù aig toiseach gnothaich: *you'll understand that it wasn't in the southern ocean that X was working, at least to begin with*; na seachdadan dhen naoidheamh linn deug: *the 1870s*; bhiodh iad a' fàgail a' phuirt anns a' Chèitean, agus a' dèanamh air X: *to they would leave the port in May, and make for X*; a' seòladh gu tuath – gu Graonlainn agus ceann a tuath Chanada: *sailing north – to Greenland and northern Canada*; tha e ag ainmeachadh soitheach eile a bha gu bhith ainmeil: *it names another vessel that was to become famous*; nuair a chaochail e fhèin is feadhainn eile dhen phàrtaidh aige: *when he and others of his party died*; b' e sin an triall Breatannach dhan tug Comann Rìoghail a' Chruinn-eòlais taic: *that was the British expedition which the Royal Geographical Society assisted*; bha daoine dhen bheachd gun gabhadh gnìomhachas a stèidheachadh: *people thought that an industry could be established*; a tha a' cuimhneachadh nan làithean sin: *that remembers those days*.

Puing-chànain na Litreach: Bhiodh iad a' tilleadh a Dhùn Dè **mu thoiseach na Samhna**: *they would return to Dundee about the beginning of November. The Gaelic for November is An t-Samhain (originally a Celtic festival to celebrate the start of winter). It is clearly a feminine noun (if it were masculine, it would be An Samhain), so the genitive form is na Samhna. That is why we say Oidhche Shamhna (not Oidhche Shamhain) for Halloween.*

Gnàthas-cainnt na Litreach: 'S **iomadh Gàidheal** a bha an sàs ann an sealg nam mucan-mara: *many Gaels were involved in whaling.*

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