

An Litir Bheag

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

An Litir Bheag is a shortened and simplified version of Ruairidh's Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh (also available on the BBC website), designed for those who are at an earlier stage of learning Gaelic. The topic each week is the same as Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh so that, once the Litir Bheag is mastered, a student of the language might wish to try the full Litir. This is Litir Bheag 510 (which corresponds to Litir 814). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodgy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

When the Vikings came to the Gaidhealtachd a long time ago, did they extinguish Gaelic? On the islands, was everybody speaking Norse for a period? Or, even when the Norse were in control, were some people still speaking Gaelic?

For evidence, we must go to genetics, archaeology, manuscripts and place-names. Dr John Holliday lives on Tiree. His Gaelic is excellent. He has been looking at the Norse names of the island. He wrote a paper on the matter.

The Norse came to Tiree in the ninth century. They changed the island substantially. How do we know that? Well, there's only one place-name today which existed before they came. That is Tiriodh, the name of the island itself.

At the south-western end of Tiree, there is an old fort called Dùn nan Gall. 'Gall' means 'Norseman'. Close by, beside a geo, there is a rock called Borabrig. That means 'landing by the fort'. John reckons that shows that the Norse were using the fort

Nuair a thàinig na Lochlannaich don Ghàidhealtachd o chionn fhada, an do chuir iad às don Ghàidhlig? Anns na h-eileanan, an robh a h-uile duine a' bruidhinn Lochlannais airson ùine? No, eadhon, nuair a bha smachd aig na Lochlannaich, an robh feadhainn fhathast a' bruidhinn Gàidhlig?

Airson fianais, feumaidh sinn dhol gu gintinneachd, airceòlas, làmh-sgrìobhainnean agus ainmean-àite. Tha an Dr Iain Holliday a' fuireach ann an Tiriodh. Tha Gàidhlig mhath aige. Tha e air a bhith a' toirt sùil air ainmean-àite Lochlannach an eilein. Sgrìobh e pàipear mun chuspair.

Thàinig na Lochlannaich a Thiriodh anns an naoidheamh linn. Dh'atharraich iad an t-eilean gu mòr. Ciamar a tha fios againn air sin? Uill, chan eil ach aon ainm-àite ann an-diugh a bh' ann am bith mus tàinig iad. 'S e sin Tiriodh, ainm an eilein fhèin.

Air ceann an iar-dheas Thiriodh, tha seann dùn air a bheil Dùn nan Gall. Tha 'Gall' a' ciallachadh 'Lochlannach'. Faisg air làmh, ri taobh geodha, tha creag air a bheil Borabrig. Tha sin a' ciallachadh 'laimrig ri taobh an dùin'. Tha Iain dhen bheachd gu bheil sin a' sealltainn gun robh na Lochlannaich a'

as a fortress. To begin with, they weren't peaceful.

The Norse were living throughout the island. They reformed the land system and the township patterns. Even today, sixty percent of Tiree's townships have Norse names.

John reckons that Gaels were living on the island throughout the Norse period. And he thinks that the language survived. Perhaps some of them were moved out of Norse neighbourhoods into Gaelic neighbourhoods. But the two people weren't entirely isolated from each other. It's thought that many Norse men married Gaelic women.

The Norse language lived on for a long time. There is evidence in place-names that it lasted until the fourteenth century. But it's Gaelic that gained the upper hand in the end. And it's on the lips of some Tiree folk to this day.

cleachdadh an dùin mar dhaingneach. Aig an toiseach cha robh iad sìtheil.

Bha na Lochlannaich a' fuireach air feadh an eilein. Rinn iad ath-chruthachadh air siostam an fhearainn agus air cruth nam bailtean. Eadhon an-diugh, tha ainmean Lochlannach air seasgadh às a' cheud de bhailtean Thiriodh.

Tha Iain dhen bheachd gun robh Gàidheil a' fuireach anns an eilean fad na h-ùine a bha na Lochlannaich ann. Agus tha e dhen bheachd gun do mhair an cànan beò. 'S dòcha gun deach feadhainn dhiubh a ghluasad a-mach à ceàrnaidhean Lochlannach gu ceàrnaidhean Gàidhealach. Ach cha robh an dà shluagh air an sgaradh buileach bho chèile. Tha dùil gun do phòs mòran fhear Lochlannach boireannaich Ghàidhealach.

Mhair an Lochlannais ùine mhòr. Tha fianais ann an ainmean-àite gun do mhair i cho fada ris a' cheathramh linn deug. Ach 's i a' Ghàidhlig aig an robh làmh-an-uachdair mu dheireadh thall. Agus tha i air bilean cuid de mhuinntir Thiriodh chun an latha an-diugh.