

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 521 (which corresponds to Litir 825). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

Recently, I was reading an old paper. It was by the late Rev. John MacRury. It was delivered to the Gaelic Society of Inverness in 1894.

Mr MacRury was giving a lecture about a natural phenomenon. Well, natural or supernatural, I'm not sure. In Uist it's called An Teine Mòr. On Skye, it's called An Teine Biorach. And there are other names for it as well - sionnachan, teine sionnachain, coinneal bianain, srada bianain, spiorad lodain and teine dreallsach. What a series of names for a thing that some people consider only to exist in the imagination!

In English people call it 'will-o'-the-wisp'. Or jack o' lantern. It's a weak light. The light is a bit like fire. People see it, or saw it, only on a dark night. Often, that was above bogs.

Some folk say it's gases like methane that are responsible. The gases are made in the bogs. They are inflammable. If there is any

O chionn ghoirid, bha mi a' leughadh seann phàipear. Bha e leis an Urramach Iain MacRuairidh nach maireann. Chaidh a lìbhrigeadh do Chomunn Gàidhlig Inbhir Nis ann an ochd ceud deug, naochad 's a ceithir (1894).

Bha Mgr MacRuairidh a' toirt òraid mu dheidhinn rud nàdarrach. Uill, nàdarrach no os-nàdarrach, chan eil mi cinnteach. Ann an Uibhist, canaidh daoine 'An Teine Mòr' ris. Anns an Eilean Sgitheanach, 's e 'An Teine Biorach' a chanar ris. Agus tha ainmean eile air a bharrachd – sionnachan, teine sionnachain, coinneal bianain, srada bianain, spiorad lodain agus teine dreallsach. Abair sreath de dh'ainmean airson rud a tha cuid a' cumail a-mach nach eil ann ach sa mhac-meanmna!

Ann am Beurla, canaidh daoine will-o'-the-wisp ris. No jack o' lantern. 'S e solas lag a tha ann. Tha an solas car coltach ri teine. Bidh daoine, no bha daoine ga fhaicinn a-mhàin air oidhche dhorch. Gu tric bha sin os cionn bhoglaichean.

Tha cuid ag ràdh gur e as coireach gasaichean mar meatan. Tha na gasaichean air an dèanamh anns na boglaichean. Tha iad so-loisgeach. Ma

type of flame present, the gas will burn. And then there will be a sort of fire.

And perhaps that's the reason that people were seeing it in olden times. When they were out at night, they had flames for illumination – a candle or lantern. Sometimes they had a torch or pine candle. The flames were causing the inflammable gases to ignite. And the people were seeing the will-o'-the-wisp because their lights were so weak. But today we have powerful electric torches. So the gases don't ignite. And with the powerful light, we don't see the will-o'-the-wisp anyway.

That's enough of the science. Now the oral tradition. I know two stories that explain how the will-o'-the-wisp came into being. One was known in several places, such as Gairloch. It was also told in Ireland. The other one is from Uist. I'll tell you that one next week.

tha lasair de sheòrsa sam bith ann, bidh an gas a' losgadh. Agus bidh nàdar de theine ann an uair sin.

Agus 's dòcha gur e sin as coireach gun robh daoine ga fhaicinn anns an t-seann aimsir. Nuair a bha iad a-muigh air an oidhche, bha lasairean aca mar sholas – coinneal no lòchran. No uaireannan bha leus no coinneal-ghiuthais aca. Bha na lasairean ag adhbharachadh gun robh na gasaichean so-loisgeach a' losgadh. Agus bha na daoine a' faicinn an teine mhòir oir bha na solais aca cho lag. Ach an-diugh tha tordsaichean dealain cumhachdach againn. Mar sin, cha bhi na gasaichean a' losgadh. Agus leis an t-solas làidir, chan fhaic sinn an teine mòr co-dhiù.

Sin gu leòr dhen t-saidheans. A-nise am beul-aithris. 'S aithne dhomh dà sgeulachd a tha a' mìneachadh mar a thàinig an teine mòr gu bith. Bha tè dhiubh aithnichte ann an diofar àiteachan, leithid Geàrrloch. Bha i air a h-aithris ann an Èirinn cuideachd. Tha an tèile à Uibhist. Nì mi aithris air an tè sin an-ath-sheachdain.