

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 607 (which corresponds to Litir 911). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.macleam@bbc.co.uk.

I was in Wales recently – in the north. I was learning a little of the language.

It's interesting to compare Gaelic and Welsh. Sometimes a Welsh word starts with 'h' and there is a similar Gaelic word starting with 's'. Salann [salt] is an example of that. In Welsh, they say halen. We say sealg for 'hunt'; the Welsh say hela. And, where we say sean for 'old', the Welsh say hen.

I was in Ynys Môn or Anglesey. I went to visit a woman who belongs to an area called Niwbwrch or Newborough. Her house is close to a beach and sandy environs. The place is today a nature reserve.

She brought out a belt and mat that were made of a plant – some grass or other. The leaves were twisted together. I asked her what plant it was. She replied 'moresg'.

It was easy enough to understand that. Moresg comes from môr-hesg. Môr is pretty much equivalent to seasg in Gaelic. Seasg means 'sedge' – a group of plants that are related to the grasses. Seasgan is another Gaelic name for

Bha mi anns a' Chuimrigh o chionn greis – anns a' cheann a tuath. Bha mi ag ionnsachadh beagan dhen chànan.

Tha e inntinneach coimeas a dhèanamh eadar a' Gàidhlig agus Cuimris. Uaireannan, bidh facal Cuimreach a' tòiseachadh le 'h', agus facal Gàidhlig car coltach ris a' tòiseachadh le 's'. 'S e salann eisimpleir dhiubh sin. Ann an Cuimris, canaidh iad halen. Canaidh sinne sealg airson 'hunt'; canaidh na Cuimrich hela. Agus, far an can sinne sean airson 'old', canaidh na Cuimrich hen.

Bha mi ann an Ynys Môn no Anglesey. Chaidh mi a cheilidh air boireannach a bhuineas do sgìre air a bheil Niwbwrch no Newborough. Tha an taigh aice faisg air tràigh agus àrainn ghainmhich. Tha an t-àite an-diugh na theàrmann nàdair.

Thug i a-mach crìos agus brat a bha air an dèanamh de lus – feur air choreigin. Bha na duilleagan air an snìomh còmhla. Dh'fhaighnich mi dhith dè an lus a bha ann. Thuir i 'moresg'.

Bha e furasta gu leòr sin a thuigsinn. Tha moresg a' tighinn bho môr-hesg. Tha môr co-ionann ri muir ann an Gàidhlig. Agus tha hesg an ìre mhath co-ionann ri seasg ann an Gàidhlig. Tha seasg a' ciallachadh 'sedge' – buidheann de lusan a tha càirdeach do na feòir. 'S e seasgan ainm

the common reed. And hesg means reed in Welsh. Thus môr-hesg or moresg – the sedge or reed of the sea.

If you know Uist, you'll know the plant – muran. The poetic name for South Uist is 'Tìr a' Mhurain' because the muran is so plentiful there. In English it is called marram grass or bent.

Women were at one time collecting and using marram grass in Newborough, as they were in our islands. Just as happened in one or two places in Scotland, too much marram grass was pulled out. The sand moved into the land. Eventually, a forest was planted to stabilise the sand. There is a little marram grass left on the sand dunes. But nobody uses it today.

eile airson cuilc no reed. Agus tha hesg a' ciallachadh cuilc ann an Cuimris. Mar sin môr-hesg no moresg – seasg no cuilc na mara.

Ma tha sibh eòlach air Uibhist, bidh sibh eòlach air an lus – muran. 'S e ainm bàrdail Uibhist a Deas 'Tìr a' Mhurain' oir tha am muran cho pailt ann. Ann am Beurla, canar *marram grass* no *bent* ris.

Bha boireannaich uaireigin a' buain agus a' cleachdadh muran ann an Niwbwrch, mar a bha anns na h-eileanan againne. Dìreach mar a thachair ann an àite no dhà ann an Alba, bha cus murain air a' spìonadh ann. Ghluais a' ghainmheach a-steach don dùthaich. Aig a cheann thall, chaidh coille a chur airson a' ghainmheach a dhèanamh seasmhach. Tha beagan murain air fhàgail air na coilleagan. Ach cha bhi duine ga chleachdadh an-diugh.