

# **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 649 (which corresponds to Litir 953). Ruairidh can be contacted at [rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk](mailto:rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk).*

*Among the townships in Tìree, there is Balemartine. I was always of the opinion that the Martin in the name was St Martin of Tours in France. But the scholars are not certain who it was. The name appears initially as Balmartin on Blaeu's map in the seventeenth century.*

*Perhaps Martin was just one of the locals. There is a house in the village called 'Martin's house'. A guy Martin was living there. The day his wife died, he himself suddenly passed away. Before that, he saw two coffins leaving the house at the same time. Apparently, he had the second sight.*

*I got the information about Balemartine from a book which came out earlier this year. The author, John Holliday, was a GP in Tìree for thirty years. He is fluent in Gaelic and he speaks it with a Tìree blas.*

*The book is called Longships on the Sand. It is about how the Vikings and the medieval folk settled the island and the place-names they created. The book is a work of great scholarship.*

Am measg nam bailtean ann an Tìrìodh, tha Baile Mhàrtainn. Bha mi riamh dhen bheachd gum b' e am Màrtainn anns an ainm Naomh Màrtainn à Tours anns an Fhraing. Ach chan eil na sgoilearan cinnteach cò bha ann. Tha an t-àite a' nochdadh an toiseach mar *Balmartin* air mapa Bhlaeu anns an t-seachdamh linn deug.

'S dòcha gum b' e Màrtainn dìreach fear de mhuinntir an àite. Tha taigh anns a' bhaile air a bheil Taigh Mhàrtainn. Bha fear Màrtainn a' fuireach ann. An latha a chaochail a bhean, fhuair e fhèin bàs obann. Roimhe sin, chunnaic e dà chiste a' fàgail an taighe aig an aon àm. A rèir choltais, bha an dà-shealladh aige.

Fhuair mi am fiosrachadh mu Bhaile Mhàrtainn à leabhar a thàinig a-mach na bu tràithe dhen bhliadhna seo. Bha an t-ùghdar, John Holliday, na dhotair-teaghlaich ann an Tìrìodh fad trithead bliadhna. Tha e fileanta ann an Gàidhlig agus bruidhnidh e i le blas Thìrìodh.

'S e ainm an leabhair *Longships on the Sand*. Tha e mu dheidhinn mar a rinn na Lochlannaich agus muinntir nam meadhan-aoisean tuineachadh san eilean, agus na h-ainmean-àite a chruthaich iad. 'S e fìor obair sgoilearach a tha anns an

*Tiree is good for work of that nature because the estate records of the Duke of Argyll, who owns it, go back more than three hundred years. And much collection of oral tradition was done there by the School of Scottish Studies.*

*You'll understand that Balemartine is a Gaelic name. It appears that the place had an old Norse name. That was Sòrabaidh. That's still preserved in the name of the cemetery – Cladh Shòrabaidh – and in the name of the beach – Tràigh Shòrabaidh. Sòrabaidh is a Norse name meaning 'township on marshy land'. Names of the same type are in Lorne and Mull, in addition to Norway and Iceland.*

*Longships on the Sand is full of interesting information like that, in addition to the social history of Tiree. My thanks [blessing] to John Holliday for his labour[s].*

leabhar.

Tha Tiriodh math airson obair de a leithid oir tha na clàran oighreachd aig Diùc Earra-Ghàidheal, leis a bheil e, a' dol air ais còrr is trì cheud bliadhna. Agus chaidh tòrr obair cruinneachaidh de bheul-aithris a dhèanamh ann le Sgoil Eòlais na h-Alba.

Tuigidh sibh gur e ainm Gàidhlig a tha ann am Baile Mhàrtainn. Tha e coltach gun robh seann ainm Lochlannach air an aon àite. B' e sin Sòrabaidh. Tha sin glèidhte fhathast ann an ainm a' chladh – Cladh Shòrabaidh – agus ann an ainm na tràghad – Tràigh Shòrabaidh. Tha Sòrabaidh na ainm Lochlannach, a' ciallachadh 'baile air talamh bog'. Tha ainmean dhen aon seòrsa ann an Latharna agus Muile, a bharrachd air Nirribhidh agus Innis Tìle.

Tha *Longships on the Sand* làn fiosrachadh inntinneach mar sin, a bharrachd air eachdraidh shòisealta Thiriodh. Mo bheannachd aig John Holliday airson a chuid saothrach.