

# **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 709 (which corresponds to Litir 1,013). Ruairidh can be contacted at [rodny.macleon@bbc.co.uk](mailto:rodny.macleon@bbc.co.uk).*

*I write a Gaelic column every week for the Inverness Courier. The title of the column is 'Am Peursa'. Peursa means 'signal pole'.*

*Now, I must admit I haven't often heard or seen the word peursa. But, the other day, I was reading a piece in English about the Western Isles. And the word peursair or perchman was in it. The piece was written by a Gael.*

*Here is my translation of it: '... the people of the Outer Hebrides are pleased when they see their shores ... strewn with seaweed. In order to apprise them of the arrival of the seaweed, most farms have a man living near the shore, whose duty it is to hoist a bundle of ragged seaweed on the top of a pole. This man is called Am Peursair, the perchman, and his services are paid in seaweed and land.*

*The author of this passage was Alexander Carmichael from Lismore. I was speaking about him last week. He wrote Carmina Gadelica. But the piece I am speaking about here is in the Napier Commission report about*

*Bidh mi a' sgrìobhadh colbh Gàidhlig gach seachdain airson Courier Inbhir Nis. 'S e 'Am Peursa' tiotal a' chuilbh. Tha peursa a' ciallachadh 'signal pole'.*

*Nise, feumaidh mi aideachadh nach ann tric a chuala no a chunnaic mi am facal peursa. Ach, an latha eile, bha mi a' leughadh pìos ann am Beurla mu na h-Eileanan Siar. Agus bha am facal peursair no perchman ann. Chaidh am pìos a sgrìobhadh le Gàidheal.*

*Seo m' eadar-theangachadh air: '... tha muinntir nan Eilean A-muigh toilichte nuair a chì iad brùchd de fheamainn ... air na cladaichean aca. Airson fios a chur gu na daoine gu bheil an fheamainn air nochdadh, tha aig a' chuid as motha de bhailtean-fearainn fear a tha a' fuireach faisg air a' chladach, air a bheil an dleastanas cnap mòr feamainn a chur air mullach peursa. 'S e Am Peursair a chanar ris an duine seo, agus gheibh e duais ann am feamainn agus fearann.'*

*B' e ùghdar na h-earrainn seo Alasdair MacIlleMhìcheil à Lios Mòr. Bha mi a' bruidhinn mu dheidhinn an t-seachdain sa chaidh. Sgrìobh e Carmina Gadelica. Ach tha am pìos air a bheil mi a' bruidhinn an seo ann an aithisg*

*the condition of crofters and cottars in the Highlands.*

*There are interesting things in his account. For example, he has words for a song sung by the people of St Kilda. The song commemorates the return of the seabirds to St Kilda every year:*

Thanks to the Being, the gannets have come,

And the Great Auks have come with them,

Dark-haired dusky girl with a cow in the fold,

Brown cow, brown cow, playful brown cow...

*I reckon the words demonstrate how important the two things were – cattle and birds – to the St Kildans. The final line of the song is The birds have come, let us hear their music! Indeed!*

*The song names a bird called the Great Bird – And the Great Birds have come with them. That's the Great Auk – a seabird that became extinct in the nineteenth century. I'll have more next week from Carmichael's account in the Napier Commission report.*

Choimisean Napier air cor nan croitearan 's nan coitearan air a' Ghàidhealtachd.

Tha rudan inntinneach anns a' chunntas aige. Mar eisimpleir, tha briathran aige airson òran aig muinntir Hiort. Tha an t-òran a' comharrachadh tilleadh nan eun-mara do Hiort gach bliadhna:

*Buidheachas dhan Tì, thàinig na gugachan,*

*Thàinig 's na h-Eòin-mhòra cuide riuth',*

*Cailin dubh chiar, bò sa chrò,*

*Bò dhonn, bò dhonn, bò dhonn bheadarach...*

Saoilidh mi gu bheil na faclan a' dearbhadh cho cudromach 's a bha an dà chuid – an crodh agus na h-eòin – do mhuinntir Hiort. 'S e an loidhne mu dheireadh dhen òran *Na h-eòin air tighinn, cluinneam an ceòl!* Gu dearbh fhèin!

Tha an t-òran ag ainmeachadh eun air a bheil an t-Eun Mòr – *Thàinig 's na h-Eòin-mhòra cuide riuth'*. 'S e sin an *Great Auk* – eun-mara a chaidh à bith anns an naoidheamh linn deug. Bidh tuilleadh agam bhon chunntas aig MacIlleMhìcheil ann an aithisg Choimisean Napier an-ath-sheachdain.