

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 723 (which corresponds to Litir 1,027). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodgy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

It's a pity I didn't stay dry on
land,
It's true that I'm not a mariner,
It's a pity I didn't stay dry on
land,
As long as I live, I won't return
to sailing.

That is the chorus of a famous song. The author says that he is not a mariner.

Last week, I was telling you about whaling. To start with, whaling was occurring in the oceans near Greenland. When there wasn't enough of them left in the north, the whaling companies turned their attention to the southern ocean, around South Georgia. Here is the second verse:

Chasing the whale in a storm
on the ocean,
My fingers frozen in spite of
their being toughened,
I'd prefer just now to be at
anchor on the Clyde,
Than climbing the masts in
South Georgia.

The man who wrote the song was whaling in South Georgia early in the twentieth century. He was

'S truagh nach do dh'fhuirich mi
tioram air tìr,
'N fhirinn a th' agam nach maraiche
mi,
'S truagh nach do dh'fhuirich mi
tioram air tìr,
Rim mhaireann cha till mise
sheòladh.

Sin agaibh an t-sèist aig òran ainmeil. Tha an t-ùghdar ag ràdh nach e maraiche a tha ann.

An t-seachdain sa chaidh, bha mi ag innse dhuibh mu shealg nam mucan-mara. An toiseach, bhathar a' sealg nam mucan anns na cuantan faisg air Graonlainn. Nuair nach robh gu leòr dhiubh air fhàgail anns a' cheann a tuath, thug na companaidhean seilg sùil air a' chuan a deas, timcheall South Georgia. Seo an dàrna rann:

Ruith na muic-mhara ri gailleann sa
chuan,
Mo mheòirean air reothadh a
dh'aindeoin bhith cruaidh,
B' fheàrr a bhith 'n-ceartuair air
acair air Chluaidh,
Na bhith dìreadh nan crann an
South Georgia.

Bha am fear a sgrìobh an t-òran a' sealg nam mucan-mara ann an South Georgia tràth anns an fhicheadamh linn. B'

Donald John MacMillan, Donald John son of red-haired Norman. He belonged to Kilpheder in South Uist. He went to sea to make his living.

But he didn't enjoy it. It was very cold and rough on a ship around South Georgia. Here is the third verse of the song:

Soaked from the snow, and
you without shelter from the
cold,
Your face slapped by a shower
from every wave,
Plenty of money and with no
way to spend it,
And it forever burning a hole
in your pocket.

In the final verse, you'll hear the word òinseach. In a few dialects, that means a foolish or silly woman. But the author calls himself an 'òinseach'.

When we get leave and we
reach shore,
This fool will go along with
the rest,
I've spent enough money at
the counter of the bar,
To buy three hotels.

As far as I'm aware, Donald John didn't buy any hotel. But, as he promised, he abandoned sailing the seas and whaling. He got work as a policeman on dry land in London.

esan Dòmhnall Iain Mac a' Mhaoilein, Dòmhnall Iain Thormoid Ruaidh. Bhuineadh e do Chille Pheadair ann an Uibhist a Deas. Chaidh e gu muir airson a bheòshlaint a dhèanamh.

Ach cha do chòrd e ris. Bha e gu math fuar is garbh air bòrd soitheach timcheall South Georgia. Seo an treas rann dhen òran:

*Dìle bhon t-sneachd 's tu gun
fhasgadh on fhuachd,
D' aodann ga sgailceadh le fras bho
gach stuagh,
'N t-airgead am pailteas 's gun
dòigh a chur bhuat,
'S e sìor losgadh toll ann ad phòca.*

Anns an rann mu dheireadh, cluinnidh sibh am facal òinseach. Ann an grunn dualchainntean, tha sin a' ciallachadh boireannach faoin no gòrach. Ach tha an t-ùghdar a' gabhail 'òinseach' air fhèin.

*Nuair gheibh sinn fòrladh 's nuair
ruigeas sinn tràigh,
Falbhaidh an òinseach sa còmhla ri
càch,
Chosg mi de dh'airgead air
cunntair a' bhàir,
A cheannaicheadh trì taighean-òsta.*

Fhad 's as aithne dhomh, cha do cheannaich Dòmhnall Iain taigh-òsta sam bith. Ach, mar a gheall e, dh'fhàg e seòladh nan cuantan agus sealg nam mucan-mara. Fhuair e obair mar phoileas air talamh tioram ann an Lunnainn.