

## **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 760 (which corresponds to Litir 1,064). Ruairidh can be contacted at [roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk](mailto:roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk).

*At the end of the last Litir, I posed a question. Here it is. Which two well-known buildings in Stornoway have their walls covered in stone from Isle Martin? The solution is – the Town Hall and a church in the town centre – Martin's Memorial Church. The stone from Isle Martin was easier to work than the stone in Lewis, which is really hard. Is that, however, why the church is called Martin's Memorial church? That the stone came from Isle Martin?*

*Well, no. The church was named for their first minister, the Rev. Donald John Martin.*

*I was also telling you that herring was being processed in two ways on Isle Martin. They were putting some of them in salt or brine. Those were the white herring. Others, they were smoking them. Those were the red herring. The herring were smoked for days or weeks. Eventually, they were turning red.*

*That made me think about the phrase in English – 'red herring'. People say 'red herring' when they are following a line of thought that takes them to a wrong or false conclusion.*

Aig deireadh na Litreach mu dheireadh, chuir mi ceist oirbh. Seo i. Dè an dà thogalach ainmeil ann an Steòrnabhagh anns a bheil clach às a' chuaraidh ann an Eilean Mhàrtainn a' còmhachadh nam ballachan? 'S e am fuasgladh – Talla a' Bhaile agus eaglais ann am meadhan a' bhaile – Eaglais a' Mhàrtainnich – *Martin's Memorial Church*. Bha a' chlach à Eilean Mhàrtainn na b' fhasa obrachadh, seach a' chlach ann an Leòdhas, a tha cianail cruaidh. An e sin as coireach, ge-tà, gur e *Martin's Memorial Church* a th' air an eaglais mar ainm? Gun tàinig a' chlach à '*Isle Martin*'?

Uill, chan e. Chaidh an eaglais ainmeachadh airson a' chiad mhinistear aca, an t-Urramach Dòmhnall Iain Màrtainn.

Bha mi cuideachd ag innse dhuibh gun robhar a' giollachd sgadain ann an dà dhòigh air Eilean Mhàrtainn. Bha iad a' cur feadhainn ann an salann no mear-shal. B' iad sin na sgadain bhàna no *white herring*. Feadhainn eile, bha iad gan smocadh. B' iad sin na sgadain dearga no *red herring*. Bha na sgadain air an smocadh airson làithean no seachdainean. Mu dheireadh, bha iad a' tionndadh dearg.

Thug sin orm a bhith a' beachdachadh air an abairt ann am Beurla – '*red herring*'. Canaidh daoine '*red herring*' nuair a tha iad a' leantainn rathad smaoinichaidh a tha gan toirt gu ceann-uidhe ceàrr no fuadan.

*Here's how the saying arose, apparently. A red herring has a strong smell. An English writer used a 'red herring' in a story he wrote at the start of the nineteenth century. Somebody was wanting to put dogs off the scent of a hare. He dragged a red herring on a path through the grass, and the dogs went that way. When they reached the end, there was no sign of the hare. There was only a red herring. There you go! You'll even learn about the English language in the Litir Bheag! Cheerio just now.*

Seo mar a dh'èirich an abairt, a rèir choltais. Tha fàileadh làidir air sgadan dearg. Chleachd sgrìobhadair Sasannach 'sgadan dearg' ann an sgeulachd a sgrìobh e aig toiseach an naoidheamh linn deug. Bha cuideigin ag iarraidh nach biodh coin a' leantainn le bhith an tòir air gèrr. Dh'ragh e sgadan dearg sìos rathad eile tron fheur, agus chaidh na coin an rathad sin. Nuair a ràinig iad an ceann-uidhe, cha robh sgeul air a' gheàrr. Cha robh ann ach sgadan dearg. No red herring. Seo a-nist! Bidh sibh eadhon ag ionnsachadh mun Bheurla anns an Litir Bhig! Mar sin leibh an-dràsta.