

## **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 917 (which corresponds to Litir 1,221). Ruairidh can be contacted at [fios@learngaelic.scot](mailto:fios@learngaelic.scot).

*At the end of the summer, I sailed around two islands near Skye. They are north of Broadford. They have a lot in common with regard to history. But in shape and appearance, they are as different from each other as possible. The first island is small, low and flat. The other is relatively large with a mountain and hill country. Those islands are Pabay and Scalpay.*

*I have given them, as it were, their 'official' names. In English – Pabay and Scalpay; in Gaelic – Pabaigh and Scalpaigh. But I [have] heard the old Ross-shire fisherman who spoke Gaelic calling them 'Paba' and 'Scalpa'. In Joan Blaeu's Atlas, which appeared in print in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, they are there as Paba and Scalpa.*

*Scalpay is full of Gaelic place-names. But, in Pabay, there are only two names and they are on the shore – a rock called An Gobhlach and a skerry nearby – An Sgeir Ghobhlach. On land on the island itself, there is no place-name – in Gaelic or English.*

*That is a bit strange. The island is flat, certainly. There is no loch or burns there. But there are beaches,*

Aig deireadh an t-samhraidh, sheòl mi timcheall dà eilean faisg air an Eilean Sgitheanach. Tha iad gu tuath air an Ath Leathann. Tha gu leòr anns a' chumantas eatarra a thaobh eachdraidh. Ach ann an cumadh is coltas, tha iad cho eadar-dhealaichte bho chèile 's a ghabhas. Tha an dàrna eilean beag, ìosal is còmhnard. Tha am fear eile cuimseach mòr, le beinn is monadh. 'S iad na h-eileanan sin Pabaigh agus Scalpaigh.

Tha mi air na h-ainmean, mar gum biodh 'oifigeil', a chur orra. Ann am Beurla – Pabay agus Scalpay; ann an Gàidhlig – Pabaigh agus Scalpaigh. Ach chuala mi 'Paba' agus 'Scalpa' aig na seann iasgairean Rosach aig an robh Gàidhlig. Anns an Atlas aig Joan Blaeu a nochd ann an clò anns an t-seachdamh linn deug tha iad ann mar Paba agus Scalpa.

Tha Scalpaigh làn ainmean-àite Gàidhlig. Ach, ann am Pabaigh, chan eil ann ach dà ainm-àite agus tha iadsan air a' chladach – creag air a bheil An Gobhlach agus sgeir faisg air làimh – an Sgeir Ghobhlach. Air tìr anns an eilean fhèin, chan eil aon ainm-àite – ann an Gàidhlig no Beurla.

Tha sin car annasach. Tha an t-eilean còmhnard, ceart gu leòr. Chan eil loch no uillt ann. Ach tha tràighean ann,

*and rocks, and peatland, and a farming settlement. Why do none of those geographical features carry a name?*

*I went to the Ordnance Survey Name Book. They only have three place-names on Pabay. The first one – Pabay itself. They wrote that it is from Norse that the name came. It means ‘island of the priest’. Modern scholars agree with them. And they have An Gobhlach ‘forked place’ and Sgeir Ghobhlach ‘forked rock’.*

*There is nothing else named on the island. There is a cemetery, no longer used, and a chapel that was a ruin, marked on the map in the south of the island. But they do not carry names. Pabay is, as it were, empty, vacant. But that does not mean that it is without history, as we shall see in the next Litir.*

agus creagan, agus mòine, agus baile-fearainn. Carson nach eil ainm sam bith air gin de na feartan-tìre sin?

Chaidh mi gu Leabhar nan Ainmean aig an t-Suirbhidh Òrdanais. Chan eil ach trì ainmean-àite aca ann am Pabaigh. A’ chiad fhear – Pabay fhèin. Sgrìobh iad gur ann on Lochlannais a thàinig an t-ainm. Tha e a’ ciallachadh ‘Eilean an t-Sagairt’. Tha sgoilearan an latha an-diugh ag aontachadh riutha. Agus tha *An Gobhlach* ‘forked place’ agus *Sgeir Ghobhlach* ‘forked rock’ aca.

Chan eil càil eile ainmichte anns an eilean. Tha cladh, nach robhar a’ cur gu feum tuilleadh, agus seipeal, a bha na thobhta, air an comharrachadh air a’ mhapa ann an ceann a deas an eilein. Ach chan eil ainmean orra. Tha Pabaigh, mar gum biodh, bàn. Ach chan eil sin a’ ciallachadh gu bheil e gun eachdraidh mar a chì sinn san ath Litir.