

## **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 918 (which corresponds to Litir 1,222). Ruairidh can be contacted at [fios@learngaelic.scot](mailto:fios@learngaelic.scot).

*In the last Litir, I was telling you about two islands near the south end of Skye – Pabay and Scalpay. On Blaeu's map from the seventeenth century, Pabay is full of trees. Is there any other evidence that it was a wooded island?*

*Fortunately, yes. In the sixteenth century, a famous churchman wrote an account of the island. He was the Rev. Donald Monro, High Dean of the Isles.*

*He tells us that Pabay was full of trees. It appears that Blaeu got his information from the cartographer, Timothy Pont. Pont was collecting place-names at the end of the sixteenth century and the start of the seventeenth century. It must be that Pabay was wooded at that time.*

*Does that mean that nobody was living there? No, because Monro wrote that Pabay was a refuge for thieves and cut-throats. People of that nature must have been living there, at least from time to time.*

*In his book 'Pabay: An Island Odyssey', Christopher Whatley says it was a good place for*

Annas an Litir mu dheireadh, bha mi ag innse dhuibh mu dhà eilean faisg air ceann a deas an Eilein Sgitheanaich – Pabaigh agus Scalpaigh. Air mapa Bhlaeu on t-seachdamh linn deug, tha Pabaigh làn chraobhan. A bheil fianais sam bith eile ann gur e eilean coillteach a bha ann?

Gu fortanach, tha. Annas an t-siathamh linn deug, sgrìobh pears-eaglais ainmeil cunntas dhen eilean. B' esan an t-Urramach Dòmhnall Rothach, Ard-dheadhan nan Eilean.

Tha e ag innse dhuinn gun robh Pabaigh làn chraobhan. Tha e coltach gun d' fhuair Blaeu a chuid fiosrachaidh bhon chàirt-iùiliche, Timothy Pont. Bha Pont a' cruinneachadh ainmean-àite aig deireadh an t-siathamh linn deug agus toiseach an t-seachdamh linn deug. Feumaidh gun robh Pabaigh coillteach aig an àm sin.

A bheil sin a' ciallachadh nach robh duine a' fuireach ann? Chan eil, oir sgrìobh an Rothach gun robh Pabaigh na thèarmann do mhèirlich agus spùinneadairean. Feumaidh gun robh daoine dhen t-seòrsa sin a' fuireach ann, co-dhiù bho àm gu àm.

Annas an leabhar aige 'Pabay: An Island Odyssey', tha Christopher Whatley ag ràdh gur e àite math a bha

*pirates. The island is low-lying. A person can stand in one place and he will get a view all around him.*

*When a vessel would come close – perhaps with goods on board – the Pabay folk could take out a small boat. They would attack the vessel. They would be returning with the booty. It would be difficult for people to follow them through the skerries that are around the island. And when they were on the island, the pirates would hide in the wood.*

*Why didn't the wood survive? Did some people destroy it because of the piracy? Christopher Whatley doesn't offer an opinion on that. But he tells us that the Welshman, Thomas Pennant, visited the Isle of Skye in 1772. Pennant wrote that Pabay was 'verdant' (as if it were covered in grass). He also wrote that the island was a refuge for assassins long before that. The days of the pirates were over.*

ann airson spuinneadairean-mara. Tha an t-eilean ìosal. Faodaidh duine seasamh ann an aon àite agus gheibh e sealladh ceithir-thimcheall air.

Nuair a bhiodh soitheach faisg – math dh'fhaodte le bathar air bòrd – dh'fhaodadh na Pabaich eathar a thoirt a-mach. Bhiodh iad a' toirt ionnsaigh air an t-soitheach. Bhiodh iad a' tilleadh le toradh na creiche. Bhiodh e doirbh do dhaoine an leantainn tro na sgeirean a tha timcheall an eilein. Agus nuair a bha iad anns an eilean, bhiodh na spùinneadairean a' dol am falach anns a' choille.

Carson nach do mhair a' choille? An do chuir feadhainn às dhi air sàillibh an spùinnidh? Chan eil Christopher Whatley a' toirt beachd air sin. Ach tha e ag innse dhuinn gun do thadhail an Cuimreach, Tòmas Pennant, air an Eilean Sgitheanach ann an seachd ceud deug, seachdad 's a dhà (1772). Sgrìobh Pennant gun robh Pabaigh 'uaine' (mar gun robh e còmhdhaichte le feur). Sgrìobh e cuideachd gun robh an t-eilean na thèarmann do mhurtairean fada roimhe sin. Bha laithean nan spuinneadairean seachad.