

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 1,023 (which corresponds to Litir 1,327). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

A hundred and fifty years ago, there was a famous occurrence on Great Bernera off the west coast of Lewis. In English, people call it 'The Bernera Riot'.

But do we say 'aimhreit' (riot) in Gaelic? Perhaps 'ar-a-mach' (rebellion) is more appropriate. The people of the island stood against injustice. They were heroes.

A little before the 'rebellion', the people of Bernera had grazing rights on the mainland of Lewis. That was on the hill country of Beinn a' Chuailein. However, in 1872, those rights were taken from them.

The landlords had power like that. The landlord of Lewis was Sir James Matheson. He left day-to-day management of matters to his factor, Donald Munro. The people of Lewis hated Munro. Under his leadership, the hill grazings of Beinn a' Chuailein were turned into a deer forest.

Other hill country was given to the crofters near Iarsiadar. But it was smaller. The crofters had to build a boundary wall between their land and the Scaliscro deer forest. And the crofters had to pay for that!

O chionn ceud gu leth bliadhna, bha tachartas ainmeil ann an Eilean Bheàrnaraigh far costa siar Leòdhais. Ann am Beurla, bidh daoine a' gabhail 'The Bernera Riot' air.

Ach an e 'aimhreit' a chanas sinn ann an Gàidhlig? Math dh'fhaodte gu bheil 'ar-a-mach' nas fhreagarraiche. Sheas muinntir an eilein an aghaidh ana-ceartas. 'S e seòid a bha annta.

Beagan ron 'ar-a-mach', bha còraichean ionaltraidh aig muinntir Bheàrnaraigh air tìr-mòr Leòdhais. Bha sin air mònteach Beinn a' Chuailein. Ge-tà, ann an ochd ceud deug, seachdad 's a dhà (1872), chaidh na còraichean sin a thoirt bhuapa.

Bha cumhachd mar sin aig na h-uachdarain. B' e uachdaran Leòdhais an Ridire Seumas MacMhathain. Dh'fhàg e cùisean riaghlaidh làitheil don t-siamarlan aige, Dòmhnall Rothach. Bha gràin aig muinntir Leòdhais air an Rothach. Fo a stiùir-san, chaidh mònteach Beinn a' Chuailein a dhèanamh na frith.

Chaidh talamh mòintich eile a thoirt do na croitearan faisg air Iarsiadar. Ach bha e na bu lugha. Bha aig na croitearan ri gàrradh-crìche a thogail eadar an talamh aca fhèin agus frith Sgealasgro. Agus bha aig na croitearan ri pàigheadh airson sin!

There was a written agreement about the matter. The crofters were told they would have rights to the new land, but under two conditions. They would have to carry themselves responsibly. And they would have to pay their rent on time.

However, after a year and a half, the crofters were told that the landlord was not keeping to the bargain. They would not have permission to keep their sheep on the Iarsiadar hill grazings any longer. They would be getting the Haclete farm on the island itself. That's all.

The crofters didn't accept that. They asked the factor to show them the letter, proving that they got rights for Iarsiadar a year and a half before. But – oh dear – there was no sign of the letter in the factor's office.

Three officers delivered eviction notices to the crofters. They would be losing their houses and their crofts. It was disgraceful. I'll tell you next week about how the Bernera heroes stood against that injustice.

Bha aonta sgrìobhte ann mun chùis. Chaidh innse do na croitearan gum biodh còraichean aca don fhearann ùr, ach le dà chùmhnannt. Dh'fheumadh iad a bhith gan giùlan fhèin gu dòigheil. Agus dh'fheumadh iad am màl a phàigheadh ann an deagh àm.

Ge-tà, an dèidh bliadhna gu leth, chaidh innse do na croitearan nach robh an t-uachdaran a' cumail ris a' bhargan. Cha bhiodh cead aca an caoraich a chumail air mòinteach Iarsadair tuilleadh. Bhiodh iad a' faighinn tuathanas Thàcleit air an eilean fhèin. Sin uile.

Cha do ghabh na croitearan ri sin. Dh'iarr iad air an t-siamarlan an litir a shealltainn dhaibh a bha a' dearbhadh gun d'fhuair iad còraichean air Iarsadar bliadhna gu leth roimhe. Ach – obh obh – cha robh sgeul air an litir ann an oifis an t-siamarlain.

Thug triùir oifigearan pàipearan bàrlingidh – *eviction notices* – do na croitearan. Bhiodh iad a' call an taighean agus an croitean. Bha e maslach. Innsidh mi dhuibh an-ath-sheachdain mar a sheas na seòid Bheàrnarach an aghaidh an ana-cheartais sin.