

# **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 1,039 (which corresponds to Litir 1,343). Ruairidh can be contacted at [fios@learngaelic.scot](mailto:fios@learngaelic.scot).*

*Have you ever heard of Operation Tabarin? A secret project in the Second [World] War. Britain sent a team to the Antarctic. They were not armed. They were there to strengthen Britain's claim on lands in the South Atlantic.*

*I'm not sure if I am pronouncing it correctly. Tabarin or Tabarin? T-A-B-A-R-I-N. The name came from a nightclub in Paris. Thus, I shall use the French pronunciation.*

*A Gael was involved in it. He was John Matheson who belonged to Shildaig in Wester Ross. I learned about him from the book John Matheson: Antarctic Seafarer' by Iain MacLennan from Shildaig.*

*In 1943, the British government sent some folk to the Antarctic. They were there to set up research stations. There was unease that neither Argentina nor Chile had accepted that Britain owned the Falkland dependencies. And the British government was concerned that other countries would attempt to take portions of Antarctica for themselves after the war.*

*They left Britain in November 1943. They went to Port Stanley in*

*An cuala sibh riamh mu Operation Tabarin? Pròiseact dìomhair anns an Dàrna Cogadh. Chuir Breatainn sgioba don Antartaig. Cha robh iad armaichte. Bha iad ann airson agairt Bhreatainn air tìrean ann an ceann a deas a' Chuain Siar a neartachadh.*

*Chan eil mi cinnteach a bheil mi ga fhuaimneachadh dòigheil. Tabarin no Tabarin? T-A-B-A-R-I-N. Thàinig an t-ainm bho chlub-oidhche ann am Paris. Mar sin, cleachdaidh mi am fuaimneachadh Frangach.*

*Bha Gàidheal an sàs ann. B' esan Iain MacMhathain a bhuineadh do Shildeag ann an Ros an Iar. Dh'ionnsaich mi mu dheidhinn bhon leabhar 'John Matheson: Antarctic Seafarer' le Iain MacIllInnein à Sildeag.*

*Ann an naoi ceud deug, ceathrad 's a trì (1943), chuir riaghaltas Bhreatainn feadhainn don Antartaig. Bha iad airson ionadan-rannsachaidh a chur air dòigh. Bha dragh ann nach robh Argentina no Chile a' gabhail ris gur ann le Breatainn a bha na tìrean Fàclannach. Agus bha dragh air riaghaltas Bhreatainn gum biodh dùthchannan eile a' feuchainn ri pàirtean dhen Antartaig a ghabhail dhaibh fhèin an dèidh a' chogaidh.*

*Dh'fhàg iad Breatainn as t-Samhain naoi ceud deug, ceathrad 's a trì (1943).*

*the Falkland Islands. They then continued to Deception Island. That is in the South Shetland Islands*

*They left five people on the island. They were going to be there for the entire southern winter. John Matheson – who was known to English-speakers as ‘Jock Matheson’ – was among them. He was already familiar with the Antarctic.*

*Deception Island was a good anchorage. It is a caldera – an old volcano. It’s a circular shape. At one end of it, there is a narrow channel. Apart from that, the anchorage is surrounded by the landmass of the island. It’s a favourable place for mariners. But there is one difficulty – the volcano is still active. It erupts from time to time!*

*The five men made their home in an old building. That was previously owned by whalers. The others continued to another place on the Antarctic Peninsula. I’ll tell how they got on – and about John Matheson – next week.*

Chaidh iad gu *Port Stanley* anns na h-Eileanan Fàclannach. Lean iad orra an uair sin gu *Deception Island*. Tha sin anns na h-Eileanan Sealtainneach a Deas.

Dh’fhàg iad còignear air an eilean. Bha iad gu bhith ann fad geamhradh a’ chinn a deas. Bha Iain MacMhathain – a bha aithnichte do luchd na Beurla mar ‘Jock Matheson’ – nam measg. Bha e eòlach air an Antartaig mu-thràth.

Bha *Deception Island* math mar acarsaid. ’S e caldara a tha ann – seann bholcàno. Tha e ann an cumadh cearcaill. Aig aon cheann dheth, tha caolas beag ann. Ach a-mhàin sin, tha an acarsaid air a cuairteachadh le talamh an eilein. ’S e àite fàbharach a tha ann do mharaidhean. Ach tha aon duilgheadas ann – tha a’ bholcàno fhathast beò. Bidh i a’ spreadhadh bho àm gu àm!

Rinn an còignear an dachaigh ann an seann togalach. Bha sin le sealgairean mhucan-mara roimhe. Lean càch orra gu àite eile air Leth-eilean na h-Antartaig. Innsidh mi dhuibh mar a chaidh dhaibh – agus mu Iain MacMhathain – an-ath-sheachdain.