

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 1,054 (which corresponds to Litir 1,358). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

I want to tell you about Cailleach Bheag nam Bòcan. That was the nickname that the people of South Uist and Eriskay had for a woman that was visiting the islands. Her nickname was translated as 'the little middle-aged lady who is preoccupied with ghosts'. Cailleach Bheag nam Bòcan.

Her proper name was Ada Goodrich-Freer. She lived during the second half of the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth century. She knew the famous Eriskay priest, Father Allan (McDonald).

Freer had a great interest in supernatural matters. She was collecting oral tradition about such things – the second sight and ghosts and other unusual things.

But she did not have Gaelic. She was an Englishwoman. How could she collect Gaelic oral tradition? Well, by using what others collected – such as Father Allan.

Freer was involved in a group called the Society for Psychical Research, the SPR. They were getting funding from the Marquis of Bute. Freer got financial assistance

Tha mi airson innse dhuibh mu Chailleach Bheag nam Bòcan. B' e seo am far-ainm a bha aig muinntir Uibhist a Deas agus Èirisgeigh air tè a bha a' tadhal air na h-eileanan. Chaidh a far-ainm eadar-theangachadh mar 'the little middle-aged lady who is preoccupied with ghosts'. Cailleach Bheag nam Bòcan.

'S e an t-ainm ceart a bha oirre Ada Goodrich-Freer. Bha i beò anns an dàrna leth dhen naoidheamh linn deug, agus sa chiad phàirt dhen fhicheadamh linn. Bha i eòlach air sagart ainmeil Èirisgeigh, Mgr Ailein (Dòmhnallach).

Bha ùidh mhòr aig Freer ann an gnothaichean os-nàdarrach. Bha i a' cruinneachadh beul-aithris mu a leithid – taibhsearachd is bòcain agus rudan eile a bha car annasach.

Ach cha robh Gàidhlig aice. 'S e ban-Shasannach a bha innte. Ciamar a b' urrainn dhi beul-aithris Ghàidhlig a chruinneachadh? Uill, le bhith a' cleachdadh na chruinnich feadhainn eile – mar eisimpleir Mgr Ailein.

Bha Freer an sàs ann am buidheann ris an canar *Society for Psychical Research*, an SPR. Bha iad a' faighinn airgead bho Mharcas Bhòid. Fhuair Freer taic airgid airson a dhol do

to go the islands to research supernatural phenomena. She was telling people that she had ancestry from the Highlands, but she didn't. She wasn't honest about her personal history.

She was involved in research about Ballechin House in Perthshire. The house had a reputation of being full of ghosts. The SPR rented the house. The man who owned it was living overseas. This was in 1897. Noises were heard in the house, but some were of the opinion that it was only [caused by] air in the water pipes! Freer wrote in the Times of London about it. Some people were of the opinion that it was just the product of her imagination.

Some say that Freer was dishonest and that she took advantage of Father Allan when she was in the islands. She used a lot of the priest's material without saying that it came from him

na h-eileanan airson rannsachadh a dhèanamh air gnothaichean os-nàdarrach. Bha i ag innse do dhaoine gun robh sinnsearan aice on Ghàidhealtachd, ach cha robh. Cha robh i onarach mu eachdraidh a beatha fhèin.

Bha i an sàs ann an rannsachadh air Taigh Bhail' Eachainn ann an Siorrachd Pheairt. Bha cliù aig an taigh gun robh e làn bhòcan. Ghabh an SPR an taigh air mhàl. Bha am fear leis an robh e a' fuireach thall thairis. Bha seo ann an ochd ceud deug, naochad 's a seachd (1897). Chualas fuaimean anns an taigh ach bha cuid dhen bheachd nach robh ann ach èadhar anns na pioban-uisge! Sgrìobh Freer anns a' phàipear-naidheachd Tim Lunnainn mu dheidhinn. Bha feadhainn dhen bheachd nach robh ann ach toradh a mac-meanmna.

Tha cuid ag ràdh gun robh Freer eas-onarach agus gun do ghabh i brath air Mgr Ailein nuair a bha i anns na h-eileanan. Chleachd i tòrr dhen stuth aig an t-sagart gun a bhith ag innse gur ann bhuaithe a thàinig e.