

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 1,086 (which corresponds to Litir 1,390). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

Thomas Keyes is an artist, based on the Black Isle. He belongs to Belfast where he learned graffiti writing skills. Then he gained an interest in the old Celtic manuscripts. He creates manuscripts in the style of the Book of Kells. His artwork is beautiful.

Thomas went back to the technology that they had in the eighth century. That was when there was a monastery in Portmahomack, in the coastlands of Easter Ross. There was a scriptorium in the monastery. And they were preparing the vellum nearby.

Thomas gets calf hides and roe deer hides. He makes vellum from them. He needs to put the hides in an alkaline solution. The easiest way to do that is by using limestone.

In Lindisfarne, where the Lindisfarne Gospels were made, limestone is plentiful enough. On Iona, where some folk say the Book of Kells was made, the limestone came from Inch Kenneth,

Tha Tòmas Keyes na neach-ealain, stèidhichte anns an Eilean Dubh. Buinidh e do Bheal Feirste far an do dh'ionnsaich e sgilean sgrìobhaidh graffiti. An uair sin ghabh e ùidh anns na seann làmh-sgrìobhainnean Ceilteach. Bidh e a' cruthachadh làmh-sgrìobhainnean ann an stoidhle Leabhar Cheannanais. Tha an obair-ealain aige àlainn.

Chaidh Tòmas air ais don teicneòlas a bha aca anns an ochdamh linn. Sin nuair a bha manachainn ann am Port mo Cholmaig ann am Machair Rois. Bha ionad-sgrìobhaidh anns a' mhanachainn. Agus bha iad ag ullachadh a' chraicinn-sgrìobhaidh faisg air làimh.

Bidh Tòmas a' faighinn seicheannan-laoigh agus seicheannan-earba. Bidh e a' dèanamh craicnean-sgrìobhaidh asta. Feumaidh e na seicheannan a chur ann an leann alcaileach. 'S e an dòigh as fhasa leann mar sin a dhèanamh le bhith a' cleachdadh clach-aoil.

Ann an Lindisfarne, far an deach Soisgeulan Lindisfarne a dhèanamh, tha clach-aoil pailt gu leòr. Ann an Eilean Ì, far a bheil cuid ag ràdh a chaidh Leabhar Cheannanais a dhèanamh, bha a' chlach-aoil a' tighinn à Innis Choinnich, beagan

a few miles away.

But in Portmahomack there is no limestone. The monks were making an alkaline solution with seaweed, particularly a type known as ‘serrated wrack’. They were burning the seaweed and making the solution from the ash.

When Thomas was making vellum with seaweed, it wasn’t white and clean like the Lindisfarne Gospels. Bacteria were growing on it, damaging the vellum. There were tiny holes and orange stains on it. That was not at all like the vellum from Lindisfarne.

But such things are on the vellum in the Book of Kells. Thomas’s conclusion is that it appears that the Book of Kells was made in Portmahomack.

He would like to do a DNA test on the vellum so that it could be compared with cattle bones from the eighth century that were found at Portmahomack. Up to now, they haven’t had permission for a test like that. And the question remains – where was the Book of Kells made?

mhiltean air falbh.

Ach, ann am Port mo Cholmaig, chan eil clach-aoil ann. Bha na manaich a’ dèanamh leann alcaileach le feamainn, gu sònraichte seòrsa ris an canar ‘slaodach’ no *serrated wrack*. Bha iad a’ losgadh na feamainn agus a’ dèanamh an leanna leis an luathre.

Nuair a bha Tòmas a’ dèanamh craiceann-sgrìobhaidh le feamainn, cha robh e bàn agus glan mar a tha Soisgeulan Lindisfarne. Bha bacteria a’ fàs air, a’ dèanamh cron air a’ chraiceann. Bha tuill bheaga ann agus smail ruadha. Cha robh sin idir coltach ris na craicnean à Lindisfarne.

Ach tha a leithid ann air a’ chraiceann-sgrìobhaidh ann an Leabhar Cheannanais. ’S e an co-dhùnadh aig Tòmas gu bheil e coltach gun robh Leabhar Cheannanais air a dhèanamh ann am Port mo Cholmaig.

Bu mhath leis deuchainn DNA a dhèanamh air a’ chraiceann-sgrìobhaidh, gus am b’ urrainn coimeas a dhèanamh le cnàmhan-cruidh on ochdamh linn a chaidh a lorg ann am Port mo Cholmaig. Thuige seo, cha d’ fhuair iad cead airson deuchainn mar sin. Agus tha a’ cheist ann fhathast – càit an deach Leabhar Cheannanais a dhèanamh?