

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 1,107 (which corresponds to Litir 1,411). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

<i>I'll be talking about maoraich in this Litir – shellfish. Here is a verse about shellfish that the old Gaels would eat: Muirsgian, mùsgan, faochag, bàirneach, eisir bheòil dhuinn. Eachan, creachann, feusgan, coilleag: maorach traghad a dh'fhaodar ithe gun a bhith sgàthach.</i> <i>'Razorfish, gaper shell, winkle, limpet, brown-mouthed oyster, otter shell, scallop, mussel, cockle: Seashore shellfish that can be eaten without being fearful.'</i> <i>You will be familiar with at least some of those shellfish. I'm going to look at only one of them today. That is the eisir – in English, the oyster. Oysters were once plentiful around Scotland's shores. They were particularly plentiful in the firths of eastern Scotland, between the Firth of Forth and the Dornoch Firth. But they are not plentiful today. What happened to them?</i> <i>Well, I learned a little about the matter by reading the Inverness Courier from the year 1872. There were reports in the paper about the loss of oysters in the Moray Firth. Fishermen from England were</i>	<i>Bidh mi a-mach air maoraich anns an Litir seo – shellfish. Seo agaibh rann mu dheidhinn maoraich a bhiodh na seann Ghàidheil ag ithe: Muirsgian, mùsgan, faochag, bàirneach, eisir bheòil dhuinn. Eachan, creachann, feusgan, coilleag: maorach traghad a dh'fhaodar ithe gun a bhith sgàthach.</i> <i>Razorfish, gaper shell, winkle, limpet, brown-mouthed oyster, otter shell, scallop, mussel, cockle: Seashore shellfish that can be eaten without being fearful.</i> <i>Bidh sibh eòlach air co-dhiù cuid de na maoraich sin. Tha mi a' dol a thoirt sùil air dìreach aonan dhiubh an-diugh. 'S e sin an t-eisir – ann am Beurla, the oyster. Bha eisirean uaireigin pailt timcheall chladaichean na h-Alba. Bha iad gu sònraichte pailt ann an linneachan taobh sear na h-Alba, eadar Linne Fhoirthe agus Linne Dhòrnaich. Ach chan eil iad pailt an-diugh. Dè thachair dhaibh?</i> <i>Uill, dh'ionnsaich mi beagan mun ghnothach le bhith a' leughadh Courier Inbhir Nis bhon bhliadhna ochd ceud deug, seachdad 's a dhà (1872). Bha aithrisean anns a' phàipear mu dheidhinn call nan eisirean ann an Linne Mhoireibh.</i>
--	---

being blamed. According to reports, they were catching too many of them, by dredging.

A man called Anderson wrote to the paper, saying that the oysters were put there by his great-grandfather, a certain Mackenzie. That was around the year 1758.

Mr Mackenzie belonged to Avoch on the Black Isle. I reckon that he was a landlord. He got the oysters at Gruinard in Wester Ross. They were put in the sea in the Moray Firth east of Avoch.

But that wasn't the entire matter. In the year 1793, more oysters were taken to the Moray Firth. It appears that they came from somewhere in the north of Scotland. But they were not normal oysters. They were a type called 'Pandore oyster' – which were famous around Edinburgh, as we'll see in the next Litir.

Bhathar a' coireachadh iasgairean à Sasainn. A rèir aithris, bha iad a' glacadh cus dhiubh, le bhith a' dreideadh.

Sgriobh fear MacAnndrais don phàipear, ag ràdh gun deach na h-eisirean a chur ann le a shinn-sheanair, fear MacCoinnich. Bha sin timcheall na bliadhna seachd ceud deug, caogad 's a h-ochd (1758).

Bhuineadh Mgr MacCoinnich a dh'Abhach anns an Eilean Dubh. Tha mi a' dèanamh dheth gur e uachdaran a bha ann. Fhuair e na h-eisirean ann an Gruinneard air taobh an iar Rois. Bha iad air an cur don mhuir ann an Linne Mhoireibh gu sear air Abhach.

Ach cha b' e sin an gnothach gu lèir. Anns a' bhliadhna seachd ceud deug, naochad 's a trì (1793), chaidh tuilleadh eisirean a thoirt a Linne Mhoireibh. Tha e a' coimhead coltach gur ann à badeigin ann an ceann a tuath na h-Alba a thàinig iad. Ach chan e eisirean àbhaisteach a bha annta. 'S e seòrsa a bha annta ris an canadh iad 'Pandore oysters' – feadhainn a bha ainmeil faisg air Dùn Èideann, mar a chì sinn anns an ath Litir.