

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 237 (which corresponds to Litir 541). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.macleane@bbc.co.uk.

Why is Eigg's nickname the Isle of the Big Women? Isle of the Big Women. According to oral tradition, it goes back to the Seventh Century. The island was still under the control of the Picts. Indeed, it was under the control of a Pictish queen. She lived in Moidart on the mainland.

Donnan and a dozen companions went to Eigg. They were Christians. They established a monastery. The place is still called Kildonnan. Donnan wanted to turn the people of Eigg into Christians.

But the queen was not pleased. She asked the islanders to put the monks to death. But the islanders were not willing.

The queen was angry. She sent a force of big women warriors to the island. She was wanting the warriors to put the monks to death.

When the women warriors found the monks, they were taking mass. They were in their little church. Donnan asked the women warriors to let them finish the mass. The warriors agreed to that.

When the mass was finished,

Carson as e Eilean nam Ban Mòra far-ainm Eige? Eilean nam Ban Mòra – the island of the big women. A rèir beul-aithris, tha e a' dol air ais don t-seachdamh linn. Bha an t-eilean fhathast fo smachd nan Cruithneach. Gu dearbh, bha e fo smachd banrigh Chruithneach. Bha ise a' fuireach ann am Muideart, air tìr-mòr.

Chaidh Donnan is dusan companach a dh'Eige. 'S e Crìosd-aidhean a bha annta. Chuir iad manachainn air chois. 'S e Cill Donnain ainm an àite fhathast. Bha Donnan ag iarraidh muinntir Eige a dhèanamh nan Crìosdaidhean.

Ach cha robh a' bhanrigh toilichte. Dh'iarr i air na h-eileanaich na manaich a chur gu bàs. Ach cha robh na h-eileanaich deònach.

Ghabh a' bhanrigh fearg. Chuir i feachd de bhana-ghaisgich mhòra don eilean. Bha i ag iarraidh air na bana-ghaisgich na manaich a chur gu bàs.

Nuair a lorg na bana-ghaisgich na manaich, bha iad a' gabhail aifreann. Bha iad anns an eaglais bhig aca. Dh'iarr Donnan air na bana-ghaisgich leigeil leotha crìoch a chur air an aifreann. Dh'aontaich na bana-ghaisgich ri sin.

the monks walked out of the church. They were murdered one after the other. Their bodies were piled up. The bodies were set on fire.

According to oral tradition, at midnight, lights appeared. And ghostly voices arose. The women warriors were under a spell. They followed the lights into a loch. There was a secret causeway in the loch. The women fell, one after another, off the causeway. The water was deep. All of the women warriors were drowned.

To the present day, that loch is called “the loch of the big women”. And the Isle of Eigg’s nickname is the “isle of the big women”. That is the name the fishermen were using when they were at sea.

Nuair a bha an aifreann seachad, choisich na manaich a-mach às an eaglais. Bha iad air am murt, fear mu seach. Chaidh an cuirp a chàrnadh. Chaidh teine a chur ris na cuirp.

A rèir beul-aithris, aig meadhan-oidhche, nochd solais. Agus nochd guthan taibhseil. Bha sin anns an àite far an robh na cuirp roimhe. Bha na bana-ghaisgich fo gheasaibh. Lean iad na solais a-steach do loch. Bha cabhsair dìomhair anns an loch. Thuit na boireannaich, tè mu seach, far a’ chabhsair. Bha an t-uisge domhainn. Bha na bana-ghaisgich uile air am bàthadh.

Chun an latha an-diugh, ’s e *Loch nam Ban Mòra* an t-ainm air an loch sin. Agus ’s e *Eilean nam Ban Mòra* am far-ainm air Eilean Eige. ’S e sin an t-ainm a bha na h-iasgairan a’ cleachdadh nuair a bha iad aig muir.