

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 294 (which corresponds to Litir 598). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.macleane@bbc.co.uk.

<p>People ask me, "Is Hogmanay a Gaelic word?" Well, no. Hogmanay came into English and Scots from French. The Gaelic for Hogmanay is A' Challainn or Oidhche Challainn. Callainn comes from the Latin calendae. That means the first day of the month.</p> <p>Traditionally on Hogmanay, the lads were running around. They were playing shinty. They were making enormous snowballs ["snow-pigs"]. One guy was putting a cow hide around his head. The other lads were hitting the hide. That was making a noise like a drum. The group was going around each house three times sunwise [with the right shoulder to the house]. When they were at a door, they were shouting: Callainn of the yellow bag of hide, Strike the skin upon the wall, An old wife in the graveyard, an old wife in the corner Another old wife in the fire nook, A pointed stick in her two eyes, a pointed stick in her stomach, This Callainn, let me in!</p> <p>Did you latch on to that? Here it is again: Callainn of the yellow bag of hide, Strike the skin upon the wall, An old wife in the graveyard, an old</p>	<p>Bidh daoine a' faighneachd, "An e facal Gàidhlig a tha ann an Hogmanay?" Uill, chan e. Thàinig Hogmanay don Bheurla is Albais bhon Fhraingis. 'S e a' Ghàidhlig air Hogmanay A' Challainn no Oidhche Challainn. Tha Callainn a' tighinn bhon Laidinn <i>calendae</i>. Tha sin a' ciallachadh a' chiad latha dhen mhìos.</p> <p>Gu traidiseanta air Oidhche Challainn, bha na balaich a' ruith timcheall. Bha iad a' cluich iomain. Bha iad a' dèanamh mhucan sneachda. Bha fear a' cur seiche mairt timcheall a chinn. Bha na balaich eile a' bualadh na seiche. Bha sin a' dèanamh fuaim coltach ri druma. Bha an còmhlán a' dol timcheall gach taigh trì tursan deiseil. Nuair a bha iad aig doras, bha iad ag èigheachd:</p> <p><i>A Challainn a' bhuilg bhuidhe bhoicinn, Buail an craiceann air an tobhta, Cailleach sa chill, cailleach sa chùil, Cailleach eile 'n cùil an teine, Bior na dà shùil, bior na goile, A' Challainn seo, leig a-staigh mi!</i></p> <p>An do ghreimich sibh air sin? Seo e a-rithist:</p> <p><i>A Challainn a' bhuilg bhuidhe bhoicinn, Buail an craiceann air an tobhta</i></p>
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wife in the corner
Another old wife in the fire nook,
A pointed stick in her two eyes, a
pointed stick in her stomach,
This Callainn, let me in!

Before the lads got in they were saying a rhyme. That's much older than the Americans' trick-or-treat! When the lads got in, they got caisean Callainn. Caisean means anything that is cas or dualach – "curled" in English. And caisean uchd or caisean Callainn is the meat that [hangs] under the breastbone of a sheep. People were killing a sheep for Christmas.

The man of the house was wrapping the caisean Callainn around a shinty stick. It was singed in the fire. It was put three times sunwise around the group. Each person was putting the caisean to his nose. They were believing that that was protecting them against evil charms.

And I hope you yourselves will be protected from evil charms! That's it from me for the year 2010. I hope you all have a Happy New Year.

*Cailleach sa chill, cailleach sa chùil,
Cailleach eile 'n cùil an teine,
Bior na dà shùil, bior na goile
A' Challainn seo, leig a-staigh mi!*

Mus d' fhuair na balaich a-steach bha iad ag aithris rann. Tha sin fada nas sine na *trick-or-treat* nan Ameireaganach! Nuair a fhuair na balaich a-staigh, fhuair iad *caisean Callainn*. Tha *caisean* a' ciallachadh rud sam bith a tha cas no dualach – *curled* ann am Beurla. Agus 's e *caisean uchd* no *caisean Callainn* an fheadh a tha fon chnàimh bhroillich aig caora. Bha daoine a' marbhadh caora airson na Nollaig.

Bha fear an taighe a' suaineadh a' chaisein Challainn timcheall camain. Bha e air a dàthadh anns an teine. Bha e air a chur trì tursan deiseil timcheall a' chòmhlain. Bha gach duine a' cur a' chaisein ri a shròin. Bha iad a' creidsinn gun robh sin gan dìon an aghaidh dhroch gheasan.

Agus tha mi an dòchas gum bi sibh fhèin air ur dìon an aghaidh dhroch gheasan! Sin e bhuam airson na Bliadhna dà mhìle 's a deich (2010). Tha mi an dòchas gum bi Bliadhna Mhath Ùr agaibh uile.