

**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 414 (which corresponds to Litir 718). Ruairidh can be contacted at [rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk](mailto:rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk).

*I was telling you about the loss [death] of Iain Garbh Mac 'Ille Chaluim of Raasay. His birlinn sank. That was off the north coast of Skye in 1671.*

*The loss left many people in the West Highlands deeply upset. They respected and loved Iain Garbh. He was strong, brave and handsome.*

*The people started to tell stories about Iain. They were saying that it was witchcraft that sank the boat. They were saying that Iain's foaster-mother was involved in witchcraft. She was living on Trodday. That's a small island near the north coast of Skye. The birlinn sank near Trodday.*

*His foster-mother saw the birlinn. She caused a storm. She put milk in a big bowl. She put a small wooden vessel afloat on the milk. She placed a charm on the vessel. The vessel started to go around the bowl. It went sunwise to begin with, and then anti-sunwise. Then the vessel turned turtle and sank in the milk.*

*There was a young herd-boy at the door. He was looking at both Iain Garbh's birlinn at sea and his*

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh mu chall Iain Garbh Mac 'Ille Chaluim Ratharsair. Chaidh a' bhirlinn aige fodha. Bha sin far costa ceann a tuath an Eilein Sgitheanaich anns a' bhliadhna sia ceud deug, seachdad 's a h-aon (1671).

Dh'fhàg an call mòran dhaoine air taobh an iar na Gàidhealtachd troimhe-chèile. Bha spèis is gràdh aca do dh'Iain Garbh. Bha e làidir, treun is eireachdail.

Thòisich an sluagh air stòiridhean innse mu Iain. Bha iad ag ràdh gur e buidseachd a chuir a bhàta fodha. Bha iad ag ràdh gun robh muime Iain ri buidseachd. Bha ise a' fuireach ann an Trondaigh. 'S e sin eilean beag faisg air costa tuath an Eilein Sgitheanaich. Chaidh a' bhirlinn fodha faisg air Trondaigh.

Chunnaic a mhuime a' bhirlinn. Dh'adhbharaich i stoirm. Chuir i bainne ann an bobhla mòr. Chuir i soitheach beag fiodha air uachdar a' bhainne. Chuir i an soitheach fo gheasaibh. Thòisich an soitheach air a dhol timcheall a' bhobhla. Chaidh e deiseil an toiseach, an uair sin tuathal. An uair sin, rinn an soitheach car agus chaidh e fodha sa bhainne.

Bha buachaille òg aig an doras. Bha e a' coimhead air an dà chuid, birlinn Iain Ghairbh aig muir agus

*foster-mother's vessel in the house. When the wooden vessel sank in the milk, Iain's birlinn disappeared.*

*People were saying that ravens appeared in the birlinn. There were up to twenty ravens. An enormous raven went near Iain Garbh himself. The black bird sat on the birlinn's gunwale. Iain drew his sword to kill it. But he was angry. His blow was too heavy.*

*The blade of the sword went through the birlinn's hull. It only stopped at the boat's keel. There was now a great split in the hull. The birlinn sank.*

*That was the end of Iain Garbh, at least according to oral tradition. There was never a Raasay clan chief as famous as him. He was famous in [his] life and famous in [his] death. And he still is.*

soitheach a mhuime anns an taigh. Nuair a chaidh an soitheach fodha sa bhainne, chaidh birlinn Iain à sealladh.

Bha daoine ag ràdh gun do nochd fithich anns a' bhirlinn. Bha suas ri fichead fitheach ann. Chaidh fitheach air leth mòr faisg air Iain Garbh fhèin. Sheas an t-eun dubh air beul-mòr na birlinn. Tharraing Iain a chlaidheamh airson a mharbhadh. Ach bha e feargach. Bha a bhuille ro làidir.

Chaidh lann a' chlaidheimh tro shlige na birlinn. Stad e dìreach aig druim a' bhàta. Bha a-nise sgoltadh mòr anns an t-slige. Chaidh a' bhirlinn fodha.

B' e sin deireadh Iain Ghairbh, co-dhiù a rèir beul-aithris. Cha robh riamh ceann-cinnidh Ratharsaireach cho ainmeil ris. Bha e ainmeil na bheatha agus ainmeil na bhàs. Is tha fhathast.