

# **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 546 (which corresponds to Litir 850). Ruairidh can be contacted at [rodgy.maclean@bbc.co.uk](mailto:rodgy.maclean@bbc.co.uk).*

*Would you eat a toad? Well, according to oral tradition, one of the heroes of the Gaels ate one.*

*Now, I should make clear what I mean by muile-mhàgag. I mean 'toad'. In many areas muile-mhàgag, or a similar word, is used to mean 'toad'.*

*We're not very keen on amphibians as food, are we? Have you ever eaten a dearc-luachrach, for example? That's the Gaelic for newt – dearc-luachrach.*

*Perhaps you've tried a losgann or frog. The French are keen on them – at least on their legs. I tried frog legs once. But that was in Thailand. But a toad, that's another question.*

*And who is the Gaelic hero that ate a toad? Who, but Alasdair mac Colla. He was a great soldier who was out with Montrose in the middle of the seventeenth century.*

*Was it a toad or frog that he ate? I'm not sure. But people believed there was a valuable stone in the heads of those*

*An itheadh sibh muile-mhàgag? Uill, a rèir beul-aithris, dh'ith fear de ghaisgich nan Gàidheal tè.*

*Nise, bu chòir dhomh dhèanamh soilleir dè tha mi a' ciallachadh le 'muile-mhàgag'. Tha mi a' ciallachadh toad. Ann am mòran sgìrean thathar a' cleachdadh 'muile-mhàgag', no facal coltach, airson frog.*

*Chan eil sinn uabhasach dèidheil air uisge-thìrich mar bhiadh, a bheil? An do dh'ith sibh riamh dearc-luachrach, mar eisimpleir? Sin a' Ghàidhlig air newt – dearc-luachrach.*

*'S dòcha gun do dh'fheuch sibh losgann no frog. Tha na Frangaich measail orra – co-dhiù air na casan aca. Dh'fheuch mi casan losgainn aon turas. Ach bha sin ann an Thailand. Ach – muile-mhàgag – toad – 's e sin ceist eile.*

*Agus cò e an gaisgeach Gàidhealach a dh'ith muile-mhàgag? Cò, ach Alasdair mac Colla Chiotaich. B' esan sàr-shaighdear a bha a-mach cuide ri Montròs ann am meadhan an t-seachdamh linn deug.*

*An e muile-mhàgag no losgann a dh'ith e? Chan eil mi cinnteach. Ach bha daoine a' creidsinn gun robh clach luachmhor ann an ceann nan*

creatures. That was even in the play 'As You Like It' by William Shakespeare.

*And the Welsh scholar, Edward Lhuyd, wrote about that stone. He wrote that it would prevent the burning of a house or the sinking of a boat. If a commander in the field had one, he would be victorious on the day, or all his men would lose their lives on the spot.*

*A strange story was recorded about a large toad at Achagavel in Morvern. A man tried to catch it – to get the stone. That was on a cold winter's day when the pool was frozen. The man made a hole in the ice. He let an otter, which he had as a pet, go through it. He remained until the toad would come up through the hole, followed by the otter. He had a stick in his hand.*

*But it was the otter, who needed a breath of air, that put its head through the hole. Without looking, the man hit it with his stick. He killed the otter instantaneously.*

ainmhidhean sin. Bha sin eadhon anns an dealbh-chluich 'As You Like It' le Uilleam Shakespeare.

Agus sgrìobh an sgoilear Cuimreach, Eideard Lhuyd, mu dheidhinn na cloiche sin. Sgrìobh e gun cuireadh i stad air losgadh taighe, agus cur-fodha bàta. Nam biodh tè aig commandair air blàr-catha, bhiodh buaidh aige air an latha, no bhiodh na daoine gu lèir aige a' faighinn bàs sa spot.

Chaidh stòiridh annasach a chlàradh mu mhuile-mhàgag mhòr aig Ach a' Ghobhail ann am Morbhairne. Dh'fheuch fear ri a glacadh – airson a' chlach fhaighinn. Bha sin air latha fuar geamhraidh nuair a bha an lòn reòite. Rinn am fear toll san deigh. Leig e le dòbhran, a bha aige mar pheata, a dhol troimhe. Dh'fhan e gus an tigeadh a' mhuile-mhàgag suas tron toll, agus an dòbhran às a dèidh. Bha bata aige na làimh.

Ach, 's e an dòbhran, a bha feumach air anail a ghabhail, a chuir a cheann tron toll. Gun a bhith a' coimhead, bhuail am fear e le a bhata. Chuir e às don dòbhran sa spot.