

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 567 (which corresponds to Litir 871). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

Seven hundred and fifty years ago, in 1266, names were put to the Treaty of Perth. The Norwegians sold their Norse lands in Scotland to the Scottish crown. Except for Orkney and Shetland.

If it hadn't been for that, perhaps the people of the Western Isles wouldn't be speaking Gaelic today. Who knows.

The islands on the western side of Scotland were under Norse control for a good period. That was recognised officially by the King of Scotland at the end of the 11th century. But the kings and nobles of Scotland weren't pleased about it. In the middle of the 13th century, they asked the Norse to sell them the islands. At the time, Alexander II was King of Scotland and Håkon IV was King of Norway. Håkon wasn't willing to sell the islands.

Alexander's son, Alexander III, took control of the throne in 1262. He sent a message to Håkon, telling him – if he didn't sell the islands to Scotland – that the Scots would take control of them by force.

O chionn seachd ceud gu leth bliadhna, ann an dà cheud dheug, seasgad 's a sia (1266), chaidh ainmean a chur ri Co-chòrdadh Pheairt. Reic na Nirribhich na dùthchannan Lochlannach aca ann an Alba do chrùn na h-Alba. Ach a-mhàin Arcaibh is Sealtainn.

Mura b' e sin, 's dòcha nach biodh muinntir nan Eilean Siar a' bruidhinn Gàidhlig an-diugh. Cò aige tha fios.

Bha eileanan taobh an iar na h-Alba fo smachd nan Lochlannach fad ùine. Chaidh sin aithneachadh gu h-oifigeil le Rìgh na h-Alba aig deireadh an aonamh linn deug. Ach cha robh rìghrean is uaislean na h-Alba toilichte mu dheidhinn. Ann am meadhan an treas linn deug, dh'iarr iad air na Lochlannaich na h-eileanan a reic dhaibh. Aig an àm sin, b' e Alasdair II Rìgh na h-Alba agus Håkon IV Rìgh Nirribidh. Cha robh Håkon deònach na h-eileanan a reic.

Fhuair mac Alasdair, Alasdair III, smachd air rìgh-chathair na h-Alba ann an dà cheud dheug, seasgad 's a dhà (1262). Chuir e brath gu Håkon, ag innse dha – mura reiceadh e na h-eileanan do dh'Alba – gun gabhadh na h-Albannaich smachd orra le ainneart.

Håkon wasn't going to accept that. He created a big fleet. One hundred and twenty ships put to sea in July 1263.

Håkon stopped on Arran. Talks began between the two sides. Alexander made sure there was a delay. Storms would begin in autumn. And, in October, some of the Norwegian vessels got into difficulty in bad weather. That was at Largs.

A Norse group went ashore. The Scots were waiting for them. There was a battle. Neither side prevailed. But it was obvious to the Norwegians that the bad weather of winter was coming. They made for Orkney for the winter. And Håkon died there.

The next king, Magnus VI, wasn't as bold as Håkon. He agreed to sell his lands to Scotland for the sum of four thousand merks, and an additional hundred merks every year. That was agreed in Perth, three years after the Battle of Largs.

Cha robh Håkon a' dol a ghabhail ri sin. Chuir e cabhlach mòr ri chèile. Chuir ceud is fichead soitheach gu muir anns an Iuchar dà cheud dheug, seasgad 's a trì (1263).

Stad Håkon ann an Arainn. Thòisich còmhraidhean eadar an dà thaobh. Rinn Alasdair cinnteach gun robh dàil ann. Bhiodh stoirmean a' tòiseachadh as t-fhoghar. Agus, anns an Dàmhair, fhuair cuid de shoithichean Nirribhidh ann an staing ann an droch shìde. Bha sin aig an Leargaidh Ghallta.

Chaidh buidheann Lochlannach air tìr. Bha na h-Albannaich a' feitheamh riutha. Bha cath ann. Cha do bhuannaich taobh seach taobh. Ach bha e follaiseach do na Nirribhich gun robh droch shìde a' gheamhraidh a' tighinn. Rinn iad air Arcaibh airson a' gheamhraidh. Agus chaochail Håkon an sin.

Cha robh an ath rìgh, Manus VI, cho misneachail ri Håkon. Dh'aontaich e na dùthchannan aige a reic do dh'Alba airson sùim de cheithir mìle marg, agus ceud marg a bharrachd gach bliadhna. Chaidh sin aontachadh ann am Peairt, trì bliadhna an dèidh Cath na Leargaidh Ghallta.