

## **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 638 (which corresponds to Litir 942). Ruairidh can be contacted at [rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk](mailto:rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk).*

*Have you seen the film 'Braveheart'? There was blue stuff on Mel Gibson's face in the film. In olden times, it's woad that would be used. Woad in English.*

*Do you know the plant? It's not native to Scotland. It belongs to lands around the Mediterranean Sea. It's in the same family as cabbage and rape. Like rape, beautiful yellow flowers come on it in May.*

*Woad is a biennial plant. To begin with, it is low with many leaves on it. The leaves are useful to dye cloth blue. In the second year, when the flowers appear, it grows high, but it is of no use for dyeing.*

*People have been using woad for dyeing for thousands of year. The Ancient Egyptians were familiar with it. It spread to Europe. It was used by the Ancient Britons and, perhaps, the Picts also.*

*In the middle ages, there was a large industry in France, based on woad. But a new plant came to Europe – 'Indian woad' – or indigo. It came from India. And that*

Am faca sibh am film 'Braveheart'? Bha stuth gorm air aodann Mhel Ghibson sa film. Anns an t-seann aimsir, 's e guirmean a bhathar a' cleachdadh. Woad ann am Beurla.

A bheil sibh eòlach air an lus? Chan eil e dùthchasach do dh'Alba. Buinidh e do dhùthchannan timcheall na Mara Meadhan-tìrich. Tha e anns an aon teaghlach ri càl agus an lus-ola. Coltach ris an lus-ola, thig flùraichean brèagha buidhe air anns a' Chèitean.

'S e lus dà-bhliadhnach a th' anns a' ghuirmean. An toiseach tha e ìosal le tòrr dhuilleagan air. Tha na duilleagan feumail airson dath guirm a chur ann an clò. Anns an dàrna bliadhna, nuair a nochdas na flùraichean, bidh e a' fàs gu h-àrd, ach chan eil e gu feum airson dathadh.

Tha daoine air a bhith a' cleachdadh a' ghuirmein airson dathadh airson mìltean bhliadhnaichean. Bha na seann Èiphitich eòlach air. Sgaoil e don Roinn Eòrpa. Bha e air a chleachdadh leis na seann Bhreatannaich agus, 's dòcha, na Cruithnich cuideachd.

Anns na meadhan-aoisean, bha gnìomhachas mòr anns an Fhraing, stèidhichte air a' ghuirmean. Ach thàinig lus ùr a-steach don Roinn Eòrpa – guirmean Innseanach – no *indigo*. Thàinig e às na h-

*was perhaps better for dyeing cloth blue.*

*Recently, I came across an old Gaelic story about how the woad came to Scotland. You can make a decision as to whether it is woad or indigo that it is in the account. And whether it is true or not, I cannot say.*

*There was an orphan in Barra. Every day he was going down to the shore. A boat came into the harbour. When it left, the lad went on board without anybody knowing.*

*When the crew found out that he was on board, they went to the captain. At that time, anybody that was on board a boat without permission, he was put over the side. That was the law. And I'll tell you what happened to the lad next week.*

Innseachan. Agus bha sin 's dòcha na b' fheàrr airson clò a dhathadh gorm.

O chionn ghoirid, thàinig mi tarsainn air seann sgeulachd Ghàidhlig mu dheidhinn mar a thàinig an guirmean a dh'Alba. Faodaidh sibhse co-dhùnadh a dhèanamh co-dhiù gur e an guirmean no an guirmean Innseanach a th' anns a' chunntas. Agus, co-dhiù tha i fìor gus nach eil, chan urrainn dhomh a ràdh.

Bha dilleachdan ann am Barraigh. A h-uile latha bha e a' dol sìos chun a' chladaich. Thàinig bàta a-steach don phort. Nuair a dh'fhalbh i, chaidh an gille air bòrd oirre gun fhiosta do dhuine.

Nuair a fhuair an criutha a-mach gun robh e air bòrd, chaidh iad chun an sgiobair. Aig an àm sin, duine sam bith a bh' air bòrd bàta gun chead, bha e air a chur thar a' chliathaich. B' e sin an lagh. Agus innsidh mi dhuibh dè thachair don ghille an-ath-sheachdain.