

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 712 (which corresponds to Litir 1,016). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclea@bbc.co.uk.

I [can] still remember the first time I had a cup of coffee in Applecross. I was visiting an old woman. She said to me, 'Will you have a cup of tea, Ruairidh?' Before I answered her, she changed her opinion. 'Or would you prefer coffee?'

That was in the seventies. Before that, I don't remember seeing coffee in Applecross, not to mention drinking it. My grandmother would take tea all day long from dawn to dusk.

It's difficult to think of Scotland without tea. But there was a time when the tea we know today was not in Europe at all. Now, some people grow it in Scotland itself. I was in Lismore last year. Where I was staying, tea was being grown on the croft.

Scots were involved in encouraging the tea-growing business a long time ago. For example – Robert Fortune. In the middle of the nineteenth century, he was in China. He stole tea plants for the British East India Company.

That was against the law and Fortune's work was dangerous. He went around in the guise of a

Tha cuimhne agam fhathast air a' chiad turas a fhuair mi cupa cofaidh air a' Chomraich. Bha mi a' tadhal air seann bhoireannach. Thuirt i rium, 'An gabh thu copan teatha, a Ruairidh?' Mus do fhreagair mi i, dh'atharraich i a beachd. 'No am b' fheàrr leat cofaidh?'

Bha sin anns na seachdadan. Roimhe sin, chan eil cuimhne agam air cofaidh fhaicinn air a' Chomraich, gun luaidh air òl. Bhiodh mo sheanmhair a' gabhail tì – no teatha – fad an latha o mhoch gu dubh.

Tha e doirbh a bhith a' smaoinichadh air Alba às aonais tì. Ach bha uair ann nuair nach robh an tì, air a bheil sinn eòlach an-diugh, anns an Roinn Eòrpa idir. A-nise, tha feadhainn ga fàs ann an Alba fhèin. Bha mi ann an Lios Mòr an-uiridh. Far an robh mi a' fuireach, bhathar a' fàs tì air a' chroit.

Bha Albannaich an sàs ann a bhith a' brosnachadh gnìomhachas fàs na tì o chionn fhada. Mar eisimpleir – Raibeart Fortune. Ann am meadhan an naoidheamh linn deug, bha esan ann an Sìonaidh. Ghoid e lusan tì airson Companaidh Bhreatannach nan Innseachan an Ear.

Bha sin an aghaidh an lagh agus bha an obair aig Fortune cunnartach. Chaidh e timcheall ann an riochd

Chinese merchant. He went to places where no European had been before.

He bought tea plants and he got them to Hong Kong. From there, they went on a ship to India.

Initially, it's green tea he was collecting. But there was a big demand for black tea. Fortune went out and collected black tea. In February 1851 he left Shanghai to go to India.

In addition to plants and seed, he took with him a team of Chinese farmers. They were skilled in growing tea. They were to have a new life in the Himalaya in India. And India was to have a big new business – one that continues to this day.

Anyway, it's time for me to go and get a cup of tea – or will I perhaps have a coffee?

marsantach Sìneach. Chaidh e gu àiteachan far nach robh Eòrpach sam bith roimhe.

Cheannaich e lusan tì agus fhuair e iad gu Hong Kong. Às a sin, chaidh iad air long chun nan Innseachan.

An toiseach, 's e tì uaine a bha e a' cruinneachadh. Ach bha fèill mhòr air tì dhubh. Chaidh Fortune a-mach agus chruinnich e tì dhubh. Anns a' Ghearran ochd ceud deug, caogad 's a h-aon (1851) dh'fhàg e Shanghai airson a dhol do na h-Innseachan.

A bharrachd air lusan is sìol, thug e leis sguad de thuathanaich Shìneach. Bha iad sgileil ann a bhith a' fàs tì. Bha beatha ùr gu bhith aca anns an Hiomalaithea anns na h-Innseachan. Agus bha gnìomhachas mòr ùr gu bhith aig na h-Innseachan – fear a mhaireas chun an latha an-diugh.

Co-dhiù, tha an t-àm agam falbh airson cupa tì fhaighinn – no saoil an gabh mi cofaidh?