

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 722 (which corresponds to Litir 1,026). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodgy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

I was telling you about William Speirs Bruce – the Scot who was well-known for exploring the Antarctic. He went to the Southern Ocean initially in a fleet from Dundee. They were looking for evidence of whales that could be hunted in that ocean.

Among the vessels that went there was the Balaena. She was quite famous in Dundee. And she's quite well-known today, because a song was written about her.

'A noble fleet of whalers went sailing frae Dundee, all manned by British sailors to sail the ocean sea; on the west Atlantic passage none with her can compare, she's the finest ship to make the trip, the Balaena, I declare.'

It wasn't in the southern ocean that the Balaena was working, at least to begin with. The chorus tells us where she was going: 'With the wind upon her quarter, her engines running free, there's nae another whaler a-sailing frae Dundee, can beat the old Balaena, there's nae need to try her on, we will challenge a' baith large an' sma' frae Dundee tae St John.'

St John is a point – Cape St John – in Newfoundland. In the 1870s, there

Bha mi ag innse dhuibh mu Uilleam Speirs Brus – an t-Albannach a bha ainmeil airson a bhith a' rannsachadh na h-Antartaig. Chaidh e don Chuan a Deas an toiseach ann an cabhlach à Dùn Dè. Bha iad a' coimhead airson fianais air mucan-mara a ghabhadh sealg anns a' chuan sin.

Am measg nan soithichean a chaidh ann, bha am Balaena. Bha ise car ainmeil ann an Dùn Dè. Agus tha i car ainmeil andiugh, oir chaidh òran a sgrìobhadh mu a deidhinn:

A noble fleet of whalers went sailing frae Dundee, all manned by British sailors to sail the ocean sea; on the west Atlantic passage none with her can compare, she's the finest ship to make the trip, the Balaena, I declare.

Chan ann sa chuan a deas a bha am Balaena ag obair, co-dhiù aig toiseach gnothaich. Tha an t-sèist ag innse dhuinn ca' robh i a' dol: 'With the wind upon her quarter, her engines running free, there's nae another whaler a-sailing frae Dundee, can beat the old Balaena, there's nae need to try her on, we will challenge a' baith large an' sma' frae Dundee tae St John.'

'S e St John rubha – Cape St John – ann an Talamh an Èisg. Anns na

were about ten vessels working out of Dundee. They were hunting whales in the northern seas, near Greenland.

Before the nineteenth century, the whalers were noticing that the whales were not as common as they had been. That is why the fleet, containing the Balaena, sailed to the Southern Ocean in 1892.

They weren't very successful, but others followed them. Eventually, early in the twentieth century, people were of the opinion that a [whaling] business could be established. They established harbours in South Georgia.

Many Gaels were involved in whaling in South Georgia. We'll take a look at a Gaelic song that remembers those days in the next Litir.

seachdadan dhen naoidheamh linn deug, bha mu dheich soithichean ag obair a-mach à Dùn Dè. Bha iad a' sealg mhucan-mara anns na cuantan mu thuath, faisg air Graonlainn.

Ro dheireadh an naoidheamh linn deug, bha na sealgairean a' mothachadh nach robh na mucan-mara cho pailt 's a b' àbhaist. 'S e sin a bu choireach gun do sheòl an cabhlach, anns an robh am Balaena, don Chuan a Deas ann an ochd ceud deug, naochad 's a dhà (1892).

Cha robh iad uabhasach soirbheachail, ach lean feadhainn eile orra. Mu dheireadh thall, tràth anns an fhicheadamh linn, bha daoine dhen bheachd gun gabhadh gnìomhachas a stèidheachadh. Thog iad puirt ann an South Georgia.

'S iomadh Gàidheal a bha an sàs ann an sealg nam mucan-mara ann an South Georgia. Bheir sinn sùil air òran Gàidhlig a tha a' cuimhneachadh nan làithean sin anns an ath Litir.