

## **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 1,064 (which corresponds to Litir 1,368). Ruairidh can be contacted at [fios@learngaelic.scot](mailto:fios@learngaelic.scot).*

*More than twenty years ago I wrote a small book for teenagers. The subject of the book was accounts of murder. Its title is Mort Mhòr!*

*There is an account of two murderers in Scotland. They were William Burke and William Hare – two Irishmen in Edinburgh.*

*At that time – in the 1820s – Edinburgh was famous for teaching of anatomy and dissection. Among the experts who would teach those skills was Robert Knox. Knox was short of bodies for teaching.*

*To begin with, bodies came from prisoners who died. But there were not enough bodies. Some people started to dig up newly-buried bodies. They were selling the bodies to Robert Knox.*

*Burke and Hare took the matter a step further, however. They didn't wait until people had died naturally. They murdered some people and sold their bodies to Knox. They murdered up to sixteen people to sell their bodies.*

*I'm sure that many of you know this story. But it's what happened afterwards that is capturing my attention. There was a court case. Hare turned King's evidence against Burke.*

O chionn còrr is fichead bliadhna sgrìobh mi leabhar beag do dheugairean. B' e cuspair an leabhair cunntasan de mhurt. 'S e an tiotal a tha air 'Mort Mhòr!'

Tha cunntas ann mu dhithis mhurtairean ann an Alba. B' iad sin Uilleam Burke agus Uilleam Hare – dithis Èireannach ann an Dùn Èideann.

Aig an àm sin – anns na ficheadan dhen naoidheamh linn deug – bha Dùn Èideann ainmeil airson teagasg mu eòlas-bodhaig agus sgianadaireachd. Am measg nan eòlaichean a bhiodh a' teagasg nan sgilean sin, bha Raibeart Knox. Bha Knox gann de chuirp airson teagasg.

An toiseach thàinig cuirp bho phrìosanaich a chaochail. Ach cha robh cuirp gu leòr ann. Thòisich feadhainn air cuirp a bha ùr-thiodhlaicte a chladhach suas. Bha iad a' reic nan corp do Raibeart Knox.

Thug Burke is Hare an gnothach ceum na b' fhaide, ge-tà. Cha do dh'fhuirich iad gus an robh daoine air bàs fhaighinn gu nàdarrach. Mhuirt iad feadhainn agus reic iad na cuirp aca do Knox. Mhuirt iad suas ri sia duine deug airson an cuirp a reic.

Tha mi cinnteach gu bheil gu leòr agaibh eòlach air an eachdraidh seo. Ach, 's e an rud a thachair an dèidh làimhe a tha air m' aire. Bha cùis-chùirte ann. Thug Hare fianais an Rìgh an aghaidh Bhurke. Bha Hare

<p><i>Hare was free from prosecution, although he was just as guilty as Burke.</i></p> <p><i>Burke was hanged to death. But what happened to Hare? Well, that's the question. Among the places where he was 'seen' – perhaps – was Wester Ross in the Highlands – a community to which I belong myself. But is that the truth – or just oral tradition without substance? I'm going to look at that question.</i></p> <p><i>A week after Burke's death, Hare was put on a coach that was going to Dumfries in the south of Scotland. That was the last time we know with certainty where he was. But, in the next Litir, we'll look at where he was 'seen', allegedly.</i></p>	<p>saor bho dhìteadh, ged a bha e cho ciontach ri Burke.</p> <p>Bha Burke air a chrochadh gu bàs. Ach dè thachair do Hare? Uill, 's e sin a' cheist. Am measg nan àiteachan far am 'facas' e – math dh'fhaodte – bha taobh siar Siorrachd Rois air a' Ghàidhealtachd – coimhearsnachd dham buin mi fhìn. Ach an e an fhìrinn a tha sin – no dìreach beul-aithris gun susbaint? Tha mi a' dol a thoirt sùil air a' cheist sin.</p> <p>Seachdain an dèidh bàs Bhurke, bha Hare air a chur air bòrd coidse a bha a' dol a Dhùn Phris ann an ceann a deas na h-Alba. 'S e sin an turas mu dheireadh a tha fios againn le cinnt ca' robh e. Ach, anns an ath Litir bheir sinn sùil air far am 'facas' e, mas fhìor.</p>
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