

# TWO SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

## A précis of the MacPherson / Cameron Schools of Piobaireachd playing.

In mainstream piping much of what we know has been handed down to us through the pupils of John Mackay (1767-1848). John was father of Angus Mackay, piper to Queen Victoria and compiler of a collection of Piobaireachd that, for years was a standard authority for many pipers.

Said to be a pupil of both MacCrimmon and Mackay teachers, John Mackay taught such renowned pipers as Donald Cameron, piper to Seaforth and Angus MacPherson, piper to MacPherson of Cluny. The descendants and pupils of these two pipers have created what is now known as two independent styles or schools of Piobaireachd playing. As we see there is a distinct link between the history of these styles and an inter-mingling of students also occurred since.



*Donald Cameron*

Often pipers ask what the difference between these two styles actually is, and often it is said that they are minimal. However there are distinct variations in style that can be noted.

Apart from any differences in the settings of tunes played. The differences that traditionally set out the **Cameron Style** could be:

A rounder style of playing.

The redundant low A. in crun/taorluaths.

Echo beats heavier with shorter first note.

Light D echo.

Light D throw.

Suibhal often played up (depending on tune).

Dithis rounder.

Less emphasis on scansion.

Breabach often more pointed.

Less time on A-Mach beats and more on standard movements.

Only 1 low G in low G taorluath and crunluath movements.

Even three note cadences.

Often Cameron style pipers will comment on “shading” in variations to prevent them from monotony.

Alternatively devotees of the **MacPherson style** often demonstrate some of the following characteristics:

A more clipped style of playing.

No redundant low A. in crun/taorluaths.

Echo beats not as heavy.

Heavy ' D' echo.

heavy ' D' throw.

Suibhal often played down (depending on tune).

Dithis more pointed.

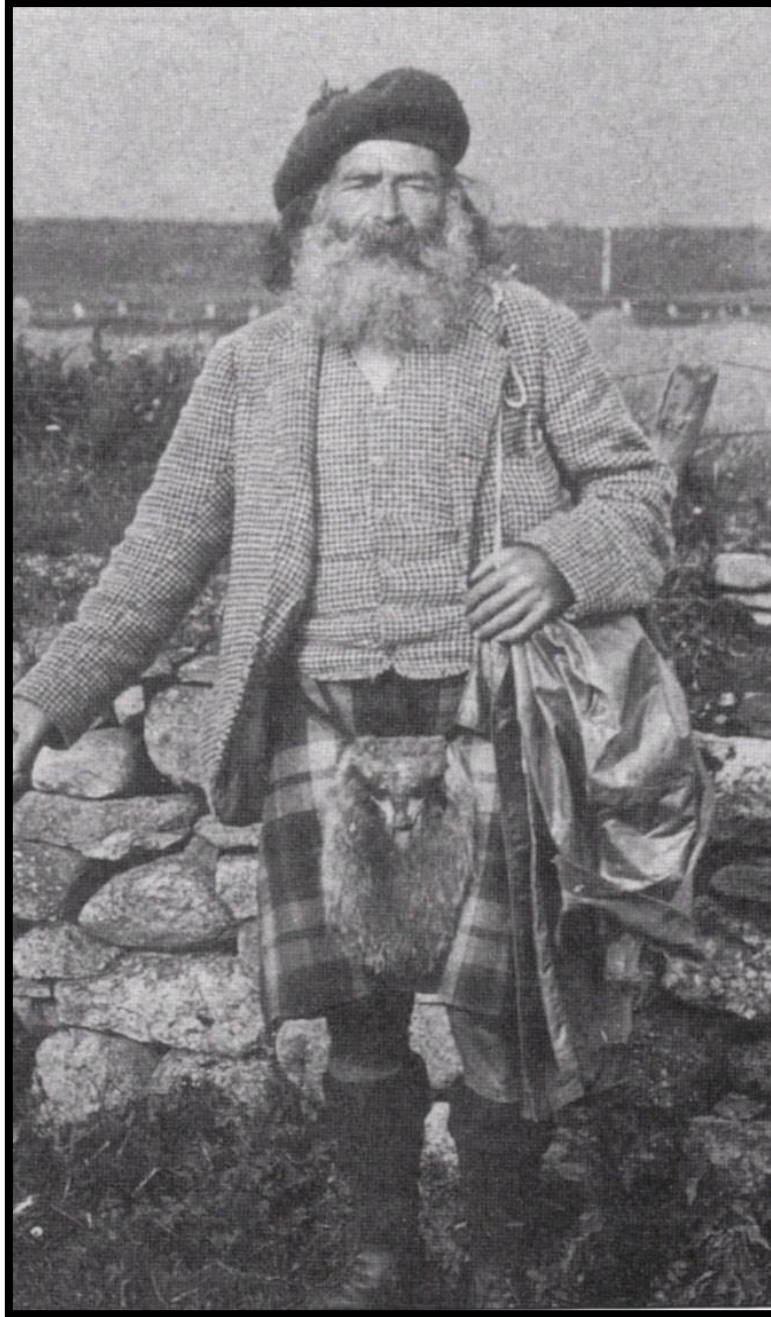
More use of scansion in variations (holding ends of phrases and lines).

Breabach rounded.

A-Mach beats more even and some beat to the A-mach.

Two low G in low G taorluath and crunluath movements.

More value on middle note and less value on last note in three note cadences which is played as a linking note.



*Calum MacPherson*

There are, without doubt, other variations that could be described and also variations between distinctive pipers from either school. Some pipers have received instruction from authorities from each school, none more notable than John MacDonald of Inverness (1865-1953), who received schooling in piobaireachd from both Sandy Cameron (son of Donald Cameron) and Calum (Piobaire) MacPherson (son of Angus MacPherson). John is noted however as one of the MacPherson style players. His playing can be heard here: <http://www.schoolofpipng.com/lost.html>

An excellent series of CD's has been compiled called "The Masters of Piobaireachd" featuring the playing and teaching of Bob Brown and Bob Nicol who were two well know pupils of John

MacDonald. Another of his pupils Donald MacLeod is featured in a series of tutorials, also available on CD.



*John MacDonald of Inverness*

Gold medallist Malcolm MacRae (1976 Argyllshire Gathering) was originally taught by Peter Davidson, undoubtedly of the Cameron style and later went to Bob Brown at Balmoral, a pupil of John MacDonald of Inverness who is regarded as one of the MacPherson school. He therefore is eminently qualified to comment on these two styles and mentioned many of the above variances in recent conversation.





*John MacDougall Gillies*

Some additions have been added after discussion with Iain MacLeod of Jersey. His grandfather was a noted pupil of John MacDougall Gillies (1855-1925), a well known exponent of the Cameron School. Iain has compiled a tape and CD's to demonstrate the Cameron style of playing which is available from many good stockists.

Iain also has a book of tunes composed by his family members called Dundee, Skye and Jersey.

Another CD has been recently compiled by the College of Piping which features the playing of Robert Reid another well known exponent of the Cameron style of playing.

Brett Tidswell Oct 2009

Many more interesting articles on piping can be found at:  
<http://www.schoolofpiping.com/index.html>