

**Sandy McDivot welcomes in the new Millennium
with a study of his crystal tea leaves.**

Future. happiness

An appropriate time I think for Old McDivot to gaze into his crystal ball, consult the stars and take a general butchers at the tea leaves. When it comes to prediction I can comfort myself with the fact that many of my fellow prophets have failed abysmally in recent times. Even the previously infallible Nostradamus seemed convinced that the end of the world would occur in July of last year. This would have been utterly catastrophic, as it would have meant the total and complete annihilation of Captain's Day. So assuming we are all still here and a quick glance outside has revealed no comet hurtling at us, then here is my attempt at prophesising what is to happen within this great industry of ours in the not too distant future.

Firstly let's look at the destiny of golf course design. An oft told story is that we are a few years behind our American cousins in this, as in so many other facets of life, and so with this somewhat depressing thought in mind, what are they up to across the pond?

Well it would appear that they are now spending astronomical sums of folding stuff on trying to achieve the natural look. So tufts of fescue are bunged in every conceivable nook and orifice, the odd bare patch is deemed classical and Mother Nature maintains bunker faces her self. It rather reminds me of one of Dolly Parton's old quotes when she said, "I have to spend a lot of money to look this cheap."

But maybe we have cause for celebration if we are to follow in their footsteps, for surly we only have to actually regress a few years in our own history to find that we were creating these highly sought after masterpieces ourselves at a tiny fraction of the cost. We used to call them Municipals. In fact there could be a whole new opening in the States for some of those dire old Head Greenkeepers we sometimes used to

produce back in the 60s who could take several hundred acres of pristine golfing turf and through a concerted lack of effort, a complete vacuum of any knowledge whatsoever on any subject especially turf management and aided only by the consumption of many thousands of bottles of whisky, transform it into the roughest bit of golf course you could find.

I also predict that one day in the future; teams of psychiatrists will solve two of the greatest mysteries known to man. Why is it only one woman golfer is allowed on to a tee at any one time. If you do not believe me, then watch them yourselves. It does not matter how far they have to walk; they will all wait patiently next to the tee while one of their number whacks it away. Only when she has driven does the next lady golfer make her painfully deliberate way onto the tee ready for her 50 yards of power thrust. This has been of great puzzlement to me over many years and to this day I have never found a satisfactory explanation.

Of equal mystification to me is the question as to why at all member's golf clubs throughout this country, there are deranged individuals who will insist on playing every day whatever the weather. Only recently I spotted two such pathetic creatures coming up the 9th hole in what could only be described as a violent storm. As they came off the green I felt a certain sympathy for them that was only tempered with the thought that at least they were near to the sanctuary of the clubhouse. This sympathy was however quickly replaced with feelings of utter incredulity as they walked straight onto the 10th tee and in monsoon rain and a hurricane strength winds the first of them attempted to hit a drive towards the flooded fairway. I was surprised that he managed a good 100 yards with his spasmodic convulsion of a golf swing but then it

was the club that was flying through the air and not the ball.

Irrigation systems my astronomical charts tell me will be a thing of the past in the golf course of the 21st century. Instead of computer controlled, satellite linked, two wire systems complete with dodgy decoders and permanently jammed valve in head pop-ups, we will have a system that will consist of a storage facility, a couple of man size pumps and a hydrant point at the back of each green. Irrigation of the turf will then be carried out by greenkeepers with hose pipes either late in the evening or early in the morning. You may believe me to have finally taken a permanent vacation from the land of sanity but I promise you, in most cases this method is a considerably more cost effective and efficient way of getting water to the areas that require it.

That is not to say I am some sort of degenerate old luddite suspicious of all advances in technology as I am a great supporter of those radio controlled hand sets that enable the modern greenkeeper to activate an irrigation station while at the furthest reaches of the golf course. I strongly recommend to all of you to get them in your budgets as soon as you can hoodwink the committee. It is not for their use in checking the system or in applying additional water when out mowing the greens in the morning, although these reasons could be the ones given to the committee when trying to persuade them to come up with the necessary readies for the purchase of these marvellous little inventions. No, the real benefit these hand sets have for today's greenkeeper is that you can inflict punishment on the members in the form of a cold water dousing at distances of anything up to a mile away.

I once had the greatest of pleasure in carrying out this specialised form of discipline to one of those spoilt

junior members who are about as likely to repair a pitch mark as they are to put their never ending supply of empty coke cans in the bins provided. What I did was wait until he was towards the end of his round of golf so as to destroy any chance of a good score he had going and then just as he walked onto the green let him have it with all five pop-ups. He then ran for cover at which point I put them down again only to repeat his soaking each time he ventured back onto the green. Then when he finally gave up I got him on the next tee. But the piece de la resistance was when he approached the following green. Early reconnaissance revealed the aim of the approach sprinklers still set in the ground and then and with perfect timing, just as he passed the carefully selected spot I was able to get him with the full 10 bars worth.

It is this sort of tireless work that can give us a real sense of achievement so critical if we are to carry out our jobs to the best of our abilities. Do not worry if the recipient of your efforts runs off complaining to the secretary, as we now have at our disposal the classic line "I knew that computer wasn't right since the millennium bug."

I also predict that the PC will take on an increasing significance within our industry, to the point where anyone wanting to aspire to the dizzy heights of Head Greenkeepership will have to be highly proficient in its use. It is not that we need them to create courses in great condition, it is just that failure to embrace them will result in a severe lowering of respect from the punters who pay our wages. Gone are the days when we could hand write the annual budget on an oil stained bit of A4. Computer generated spreadsheet format; complete with 3D bar charts is

what they have already come to expect.

The Internet will become increasingly influential in our jobs as both a product-purchasing tool and as a way of sharing information on the latest technological advances. Manufacturers and supply companies may view this to be a welcome addition to their selling armoury but they had better beware as we would then have the ability of not telling ten of our colleagues about shoddy service but 10,000.

As we become more expert in the use of the computer I do believe that we greenkeepers will more and more be offered the job of Golf Club Managers. This has already begun to happen as it becomes obvious to the powers that be that employing us for overall control makes a great deal of sense when it comes to streamlining the management.

We are already controlling our own finances and are rapidly learning the art of negotiation and communication, so it would appear utterly logical to put us in overall charge of the entire establishment. The Professional Golfers have aspired to this and with some success but there is a conflict of interest in employing them as they still have to spend most of their time giving lessons and selling equipment in the shop. Retraining of the Secretaries may also be an option but have you ever heard of one willing to learn everything there is to know about greenkeeping, including how to change the oil on a tractor or

clear out a drainage ditch. I think not. So I believe the door is well and truly open for anyone out there willing to go down this particular road.

Wishful thinking though it maybe I do hope that I will one day come to work and not be asked, "What's the weather going to do today?" by all and sundry. It's not that I mind being asked this, it's just that it seems to infer that as a somewhat simple person of the land I have a kind of sixth sense built into my meagre brain.

Then there is the line they come up with on a regular basis during the summer when we are attempting a little bit of drought stress on the greens in an effort to reduce the shallow rooting poa annua. "You'll lose them," they say. Admittedly it is usually heard when it looks like we have been mowing the greens with a flame thrower but it always conjures up thoughts of arriving at work one day only to find that due to our provident watering techniques all the greens have completely vanished, presumably along with greenside bunkers.

Health and safety within the workplace has quite rightly taken on a greater and greater significance in our jobs and I can see no sign of this trend changing. It started with COSHH assessments, and then risk assessments, and then workplace assessments. Somewhat surprisingly we have never been asked to perform an assessment on the most dangerous of all objects to be seen on a golf course, the golfers themselves.

Then there has been the equally important green movement. Once again we will be travelling much fur-

ther along this path in the next century. In fact if we take both the green movement and the health and safety trends to their logical conclusion we could end up with the organic golf course. Horse drawn gang mowers could in many cases replace those toxin producing tools of mass destruction that we use to cut the grass. All pesticides would be banned and all fertilisers could be based on the composted by-products of farmyard animals. I may have convinced you that I am now in the latter stages of senile dementia or you may believe my predictions with just a few minor adjustments are a genuine possibility. After all, we are already using organic fertilisers to a greater extent and we all know the less pesticides we use the greater the plant diversity we encourage. Certainly it would be quite a PR exercise for our industry.

This brings me back to my first point about following the lead from across the Atlantic. Maybe it is time we took the initiative and took golf into the next millennium ourselves. But before you all rush off and replace your mechanic with a vet, may I wish everyone who works in greenkeeping best wishes for the future and here's to a happy and prosperous next 1,000 years.

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