



Why we don't need Robots

More than 20 years ago I was rudely woken by the screeching of my alarm clock, telling me in its own obnoxious way that it was 4 am and time for me to get up.

As a 15 year old I could not think of anything worse, but I wiped the drool from my face, stumbled my way to the bathroom, and started to get ready for my brother to pick me up and take me to work on a golf course for the very first day. Unbeknown to me, that day would be the start of a

lifelong love and passion of greenkeeping. I was put through my paces like any young apprentice of the time and set to task with the most menial of jobs. I endured, I carried on, I worked my way up to more responsibility and soon I was completely head over heels with this profession.

I moved on to my first proper job working for one of the great greenkeepers of our time and prodigy of the late great Jim Arthur, Gordon Irvine. Working here I again was put through the mire in what I

describe as a proper apprenticeship, where I had to earn the right to progress further in the company standings. The lessons I learnt from all of that team at Mill Ride are irreplaceable and I use many techniques I was taught and shown by these fantastic traditionalist greenkeepers today.

All the way through my time in greenkeeping the lasting memories have been with my colleagues, trying to outdo their work in friendly but fierce competition, picking up on the slightest of



4 min. reading time

BACKGROUND

Who will pay the fees for our governing bodies like BIGGA if there are only a small fraction of greenkeepers left that haven't been replaced by machines?

that element away from our trade: to automate, to futurize, to bastardize our profession, to turn it into nothing but a production line where you can maintain your course from a press of a button. Why would anyone want this? But sadly there are, and a growing push for robot mowers that may be a small process, but it has the potential to completely ruin greenkeeping as we know it!

It is an all too familiar sight around the world that honest hard working people are losing their jobs because they are being replaced by robots. Surveys have found that within ten years there will be no taxi drivers left. And what will happen to the lorry driver?

Not all of us have brains wired to be computer programmers. I myself find IT the most difficult and tedious process of my work, but I have had to adapt a little to keep my records up to date. But it has been more of a struggle.

An unpublished report in America found that 47% of total employment is endangered with the upcoming wave of technological advances. 47%, that is almost one out of two people will lose their jobs, and who will this be? The ones who are not masterminds with computers.

I have heard that robot mowers are not intended to replace greenkeepers, but believe me, if it becomes more cost effective then it will. I have already heard that one general manager wants to get a robot mower so he doesn't have to replace a member of staff; it is happening already.

It will effect work force numbers and we will lose proper apprenticeships, for there will be no need for a greenhorn. It will be replaced by a computer programmer, you won't be able to go out and hand cut a green and look back to think to yourself

'I done that'. That will be done by a robot; no more team spirit and 'we are in this together' attitudes. Now who wants that?

And why? Why would you want to lose all these perks of being a greenkeeper to sit behind a desk? Is it for monitoring? Maybe, but for me our profession is an art, a feeling, an instinctual entity where you become one with your golf course, where you know all the little indiscretions of the course and how to treat it, not something where you just look at numbers and go from there. Is it for precision? I don't believe so. There is not a robot around that could cut a better green than I, and I am not alone. No, it is to save money. They can justify robots as much as they like, but at the end of the day it is because in the long run robots will be cheaper to operate.

Programming a robot is IT and not greenkeeping, and leave greenkeeping to those who appreciate and respect and cherish this great profession of ours

I am sure that this may sound enticing to the GM, but not so much for our profession. Who will pay the fees for our governing bodies like BIGGA if there are only a small fraction of greenkeepers left that haven't been replaced by machines?

I may be protective of profession, but that is because that is all I know and I would hate to see others denied the same life changing experiences I have had in my career because they have been replaced by a machine. It is a dangerous road to start treading. If that is the path you want to walk down, then do not have the audacity to call yourself a greenkeeper, because programming a robot is IT and not greenkeeping, and leave greenkeeping to those who appreciate and respect and cherish this great profession of ours.

Kristian Summerfield

Kristian Summerfield is head Greenkeeper at Yelverton Golf Club and was Dutch Greenkeeper of the Year in 2015

indiscretions like a 1 mm wide Mohican or lines so bendy they look like bananas.

It was the idea of working outside on a golf course that first got me interested in greenkeeping, but it was the job satisfaction, teamwork, working with nature that kept me enthralled with our great profession.

I am lucky enough to now work at the beautiful Yelverton Golf Club, where wild animals roam, and we are blessed with the most amazing sunrises that sparkle when the sun pops its head up above the moor. What lucky people we are to be able to do this job for a living, which is why I find it astonishing that there are some that want to take