

Letter from Scotland

It seems a long time ago now, but last year I visited Chanonry Point overlooking the Moray Firth. It's best known for its dolphins but it is also the place where the 17th century Brahan Seer is supposed to have met an uncomfortable end.



A warning light for 2019, Chanonry Point.

He was burnt in a tar barrel on the orders of Lady Seaforth because he had predicted her husband would be unfaithful. Being the Scottish Nostradamus was a dangerous occupation.

But making predictions can also be fun and can help concentrate the mind on what lies ahead. So, I'm going to make ten daring predictions for 2019.

But first, a little

history...or at least, what's happened in Scotland this week.



2018 Midnight Hogmanay Fireworks Photo Martin P McAdam

Hogmanay fireworks and pop concerts lit up the sky, as usual, in Edinburgh, Stirling, Aberdeen and Inverness. Smaller towns held their own traditional celebrations – fireball and torchlight parades in Stonehaven and Comrie, a bonfire in Biggar. The weather was kind, the crowds friendly and all passed off without the police or the fire brigade becoming over-stressed.



Loony Dook 2018 Photo Ian Georgeson

On New Year's Day, over a thousand crazy celebrants plunged into the Firth of Forth at

South Queensferry

in the annual "Loony Dook." They were dressed as pirates, dinosaurs, zebras, Hawaiian dancers, even Donald Trump joined in the madness, as we might have expected.

Meanwhile on the other side of the country the First Minister Nicola Sturgeon and the Duke of Rothesay (Prince Charles) were in a totally different mood. They were in Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Iolaire disaster. This was the last cruel blow of the First World War. The troop ship Iolaire was bringing home 283 soldiers when it struck rocks at the entrance to the harbour. Only 79 men survived.

And it's in this sombre mood that I begin my predictions for 2019.

The world will continue to drift towards war. Putin's Russia is the greatest threat, ready to take advantage of the tinderbox in the Middle East.

The United Nations will lose still more of its peacekeeping powers because it won't face up to the need to end the veto.

China will take more of a lead in economic and technological affairs. I could predict that it would land a spacecraft on the far side of the Moon, but it has already done that this week.

Climate change will continue to get worse. A report out this week from Scotland's environmental

organisations warned of "catastrophic" effects on wildlife if we don't reduce net carbon emissions to zero by 2050.

The great Scottish/British public will insist on reducing plastic waste this year, even taking action themselves in their own purchasing.

It will be a cold winter (already Braemar was down to minus 10 degrees Celsius this week), followed by a hot dry summer.

Brexit will not happen. In the end, MPs will vote to hold another referendum.

Both Scottish Labour and the Scottish Conservatives will have new leaders before the year is out.

Celtic will win all three major titles again this year.

Scotland's women's football team will reach the semi-finals of the World Cup.

So, I have put my slim reputation on the line and applied to join the Worshipful Company of Grand Seers. The Brahan Seer is supposed to have predicted the Jacobite defeat at Culloden in 1746 and the Piper Alpha oil rig disaster of 1988. Nostradamus is said to have predicted the French Revolution, both World Wars and the death of Princess Diana. But their predictions were in such vague terms that they could be applied to virtually any event in history.

I reckon my predictions are more specific and more dangerously short-term, so if I get 5 out of 10 right, I hope the editor

will not burn me to death in a barrel of tar. (Watch this space! Ed.)