

The Jubilee Garden Labyrinth

It was always the hope of the Saffron Walden Initiative committee members, who organised the second Saffron Walden Maze Festival in 2013, that they would be able to leave a permanent and tangible addition to the unique presence of two historic mazes in the town. After investigating three other sites which proved incompatible with ancient monument restrictions or local authority plans for recreation, the centrally located Jubilee Garden bandstand was proposed and approved by the Town Council.

The form of the octagonal covered space suggested a labyrinth made out of contrasting paving blocks laid over the existing concrete slab, which will permit its continued use for music performances and art exhibitions. Using the 100x 200mm module of a standard sand-bedded block, the local designer, John Ready, was able to devise a labyrinth of nine turns within the overall width of 6.1metres, which winds towards and around the centre, before moving outwards again to finish adjacent to the starting point. The overall length of the path is over 100 yards and its various turns reveal attractive views over the garden, with the soaring spire of St Mary's Church beyond. The central octagon of the maze is decorated with a sleeping hare of semi-abstract design.

Swan Meadow Maze

The town's most recent open-air maze was opened in August 2016 by world expert Jeff Saward to mark the beginning of the third Saffron Walden Maze Festival and, appropriately for a gateway to the town's historic attractions, its internal layout announces that 'Saffron Walden Amazes'.



The use of reconstituted stone paving for the walkways, dark blue slate pieces to infill the subdivisions, woven willow for the fence enclosure and external ground cover planting of pachysandra and miniature daffodils is intended to complement the natural surroundings of willow trees and the nearby duck pond.

Miniature finger labyrinths and mazes are set into the tops of pre-cast planters featuring a Greek key design and provide the opportunity of added interaction for young children as they move around the turns of the maze's pathways. There are two entry / exit points from the adjacent public footpath, each of which link to the north-east corner where a large angular head overlooks the whole installation.

Michael Ayrton's Sun Maze Sculpture in The Fry Art Gallery

Michael Ayrton the sculptor, broadcaster and writer, whose work can be seen at The Fry Art Gallery, lived near Saffron Walden and is buried at Hadstock. He visited Greece in 1958 and became pre-occupied with the legends of Daedalus and Icarus and the imagery based around the Minotaur and the maze. 'Such a total maze each man makes round himself and each is different from any other', Michael Ayrton, 1967.

Design: James Butler www.jamesbutlerdesign.co.uk

The Saffron Walden Mazes



The Saffron Walden Mazes

The historic market town of Saffron Walden is uniquely fortunate in having four mazes: the ancient turf maze on the Common, the Victorian yew hedge maze in Bridge End Garden, the Jubilee Garden Bandstand Labyrinth and the Swan Meadow Maze. Also of note is Michael Ayrton's Sun Maze Sculpture in the Fry Art Gallery. The passage of time has obscured the ancient origins of labyrinths and mazes, although such uncertainties probably add to the intrigue and fascination with which many people associate them. Whether or not the ancient myths have any relevance today is largely a matter of personal interpretation.

Every few years, Saffron Walden Initiative organises a Maze Festival in the town. This unique event celebrates Saffron Walden's maze culture and explores man's fascination with mazes and labyrinths over the centuries. The first Maze Festival was held in August 2011.

The Turf Maze on the Common

The turf maze (Labyrinth) on the Common is of great antiquity and importance. It is the largest example of its type in the world and is one of the eight surviving turf mazes in England. Its design is basically circular with 17 circuits. Four bastions at equal distances around the circumference give the maze a total diameter of 132 feet. It is enclosed by a bank and ditch, the overall



dimensions of which are 150 x 110 feet. The pathway follows grooves cut in the turf and approaches a mile in length.

Restorations of this maze are recorded for 1826, 1841, 1859, 1887 and 1911, when the pathway was laid with bricks on edge. The most recent recutting was completed in 1979. On this occasion the bricks were relaid flat. An ash tree once occupied the central mound, but this was burnt down during a Guy Fawkes celebration in 1823.

The Hedge Maze, Bridge End Garden

Work to create the delightful Victorian garden at Bridge End commenced in the late 18th Century and was completed in the mid-19th Century. The Garden was started by Atkinson Francis Gibson of Saffron Walden and continued by his son Francis. In around 1840, Francis Gibson laid out and planted the yew hedge maze. It was conceived in the Italian Renaissance style, which was fashionable at that time and comprised an impressive 2000 feet of pathways. The entrance to the maze area is gained through richly ornamented and impressive wrought iron gates.

The maze was originally embellished with statues, columns, a pavilion and other architectural garden ornaments, some of which placed false emphasis on paths leading to dead ends to deceive those seeking the central goal.

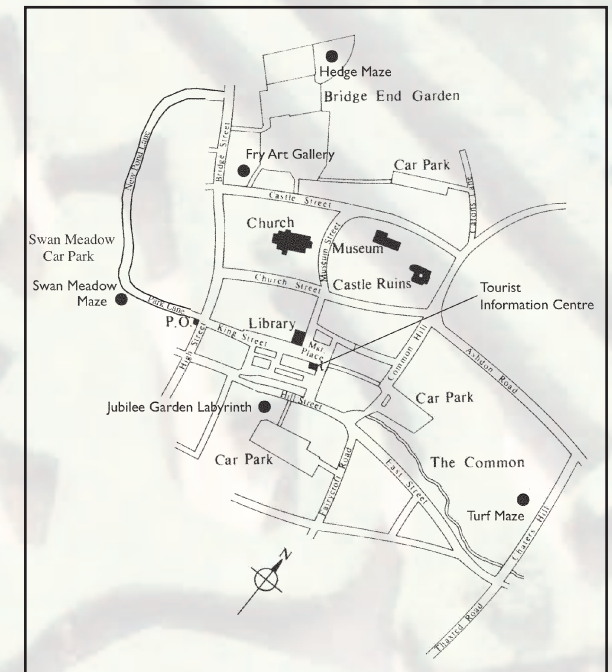
The design has a single direct route to the centre. The key to finding this route is to follow the left hand hedge in and out of every turn and dead end until the goal is reached. Originally, an elevated platform existed in the centre which allowed views over the maze; this was reinstated in July 2000 with donations made by visitors and supporters of Bridge End Garden.

Records show that by 1905 the maze was open to the public. For 6 pence, the head gardener would unlock the gates and allow entrance.

By 1949 the maze had fallen into neglect and by 1983, it was little more than an overgrown spinney. In 1984, a programme of research and restoration was put in hand by Uttlesford District Council. An archaeological investigation was undertaken to supplement the limited knowledge of the maze and its construction.

The site was cleared in February 1984 and then surveyed. The original maze design was marked out later that year. The paths were reconstructed, together with the banks which were subsequently planted in the December with over 1000 yews.

At midday on 13th July 1991, the maze was officially reopened by Mr. Anthony Fry, great-great grandson of Francis Gibson for the enjoyment and delight of future generations.



For opening times of all mazes, please contact

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www.visitsaffronwalden.gov.uk
www.saffronwaldenmazefestival.co.uk
www.fryartgallery.org