

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

THE MAZE, SAFFRON WALDEN

Auteur(s) : Historic England <https://historicengland.org.uk/>

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THE MAZE, SAFFRON WALDEN

Name: THE MAZE, SAFFRON WALDEN

County: Essex

District: Uttlesford (District Authority)

Parish: Saffron Walden

label.localisation: Latitude: 52.023989
Longitude: 0.24715850
National Grid Reference: TL 54278 38558
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1000741
Date first listed: 01-Jul-1987

Details

A turf maze, thought to be of medieval origin, set on Saffron Walden common.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Saffron Walden maze is thought to be of medieval origin, although the earliest documentary record comes from 1699, when an entry in the Corporation account books refers to a payment for it to be re-cut (Matthews 1922). It is illustrated, somewhat schematically, in the 1789 edition of Camden's *Britannia* (ibid). Matthews records the local tradition that the maze is only a copy of a much larger maze which formerly existed further to the east. He also recounts the story that a large ash tree once grew in the centre, which was destroyed by fire in the Guy Fawkes celebrations of 5 November 1823 (ibid). On several occasions after this the maze became neglected but was the subject of further re-cutting in the years 1828, 1841, 1859, and 1887. In 1911 it was again re-cut, this time underlaid with bricks to help preserve it as a feature. In 1978 and 1979 the maze was again restored, damaged bricks were replaced and all were cemented on their sides to create a c 12cm wide path. It remains (2000) in the ownership of Saffron Walden Town Council.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The maze lies in the centre of the eastern boundary of the generally level Saffron Walden common which itself sits in the centre of the town.

OTHER LAND The maze (scheduled ancient monument) consists of a series of concentric circles cut into turf, surrounded by a low bank. It measures c 43m from corner to corner, the main areas of circular paths being c 29m in diameter. It is laid in a unicursal pattern formed of seventeen linked circles, and has four linked outer horseshoe-shaped bastions or 'bellows' which are, like the centre of the maze, raised slightly above the main circular paths. The narrow shallow grooves which form the paths are marked by bricks and begin on the north or south sides of the maze.

REFERENCES

Roy Comm Hist Monuments Engl Inventories: Essex I, (1916), p 260 W Matthews, *Mazes and labyrinths* (1922), pp 82-4 A Fisher, R Coate and G Burgess, *A celebration of mazes* (1984), pp 7, 34
Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1877 2nd edition published 1897 OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1897

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Description written: October 2000 Register Inspector: EMP Edited: September 2001

Legal

This garden or other land is registered under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by Historic England for its special historic interest.