

British Turf Labyrinths - an update

Marilyn Clark

Over the last few years, I have been fortunate enough to be able to visit all 8 remaining turf labyrinths, as well as the sites of 2 former turf labyrinths, here in England. For the benefit of both existing and new enthusiasts, I am able to present this updated report on them. Not all are easy to find or easily accessible, but all are well worth the effort involved in seeking them out.

Alkborough

A small village on South Humberside approximately 10 miles north of Scunthorpe. The maze, known as Julian's Bower, is very well signposted and easy to find. In a picturesque location, overlooking the confluence of the river Trent into the Humber estuary. The maze is 43.5ft. in diameter of 'Chartres' type, sunk in a circular hollow. It was rather worn-looking, when I visited it, in August 1992, following a very dry spell, and the edges of the pathways were beginning to crumble, Hopefully its condition will now have improved.

The Julian's Bower turf maze, Alkborough, Sth.Humberside; June 1992.

Dalby

Situated beside the road, on top of the Howardian Hills, approximately 13 miles north of York, between the villages of Brandsby and Dalby. Sometimes called the Skewsby maze, due to its proximity to the village, known as City of Troy, approached by following the B1363 out of Brandsby, as far as the crossroads. Turn right (signposted Dalby and Terrington) then sharp left. Continue for a mile or so, past a small wood on your right and you will see the maze surrounded by a low white wooden railing. The maze is 26 x 22 ft., of 'classical' design, and is maintained in excellent condition. The smallest turf maze in Europe.

Wing

The village of Wing is 5 miles south east of Oakham in Leicestershire, at the southern edge of Rutland Water. The maze is easy to find, being signposted as The Old Maze. It stands at the roadside, surrounded by a white wooden fence. It is of 'Chartres' design and 50ft. in diameter. It remains in superb condition.

Somerton

A very large maze, 60.5 x 51.5ft. in diameter, of 'classical' design, situated 1.5 miles east south east of Somerton, Oxfordshire. It is on private land belonging to Troy Farm and is to be found on the side of the road apposite the farmhouse, surrounded by a tall hedge. In excellent condition and very impressive when viewed for the first time, due to its sheer size. (Editors note: Troy Farm has recently been sold to new owners - the current visiting situation is uncertain - please seek permission before attempting to view the site).

Hilton

Situated on the village green at Hilton, Cambridgeshire. It is an adapted 'Chartres'

design, 55ft. in diameter, with a pillar at the centre. It is easy to find and in a very pleasant open setting - a lovely spot for a summer picnic. Also in very good condition.

Saffron Walden

As the smallest turf maze in Europe is at Dalby, so is the largest at Saffron Walden in Essex. Found on the Common, it has an overall diameter of 132ft., including the four bastions. The pathways are the grooves rather than the turf ridges, and these are brick-lined. This is again in excellent condition.

Winchester

Known as the Mizmaze, a square maze, 90 x 86ft., found on St. Catherine's Hill, within an Iron Age hillfort to the south of Winchester. The maze is easy to find but the hill is not, as it is not signposted in any way. at the side of the A33, just beyond the junction with the minor road to Morestead, there is a lay-by. The path to the hill is at the side of the lay-by and the hillfort is unmistakable, to the left. If there has been recent rain, wellington boots are advisable! A steep climb up the path is rewarded with magnificent views across the surrounding countryside. The maze is to be found on the very top of the hill, to the right of the large clump of trees. I visited on October, when the grass was quite long. It was a cold, damp day but it was pleasing to see several children running around the pathways (which are grooves). Constant use makes the pathways clear, otherwise the maze would quickly overgrow and be lost. Probably better visited when the grass is short, in the Spring.

The Winchester Mizmaze, spring 1992.

Breamore

Breamore is a small Hampshire village 6 miles south of Salisbury. A really beautiful maze, although not easy to find. I visited out of the holiday season and there was no-one around to give directions. Luckily I had a copy of 'A Walk to Breamore Mizmaze', which gives very clear instructions for finding the maze. It is best found by following the public footpath through the grounds of Breamore House. It was rather muddy in parts, due to recent rain - appropriate footwear recommended! On leaving the woods, the maze is well signposted. It is 84 x 81 ft. in diameter, of 'Chartres' design, within its own small wood, the trees completely encircling it. It is a scheduled ancient monument and is fenced off, thus being impossible to walk upon, which is a little disappointing after the long walk to find it. However, it is in superb condition and a joy to visit.

The Mizmaze, Breamore, Hampshire, August 1991. Recently restored it is now in superb condition.

There are also two existing sites of former turf labyrinths, which could possibly at some time in the future, be restored. Perhaps one day we may have ten turf labyrinths!

Asenby

On the edge of the village of Asenby, in Yorkshire (5 miles southwest of Thirsk), there is a licensed restaurant, 'The Crab and Lobster' (formerly 'The Shoulder of Mutton'). Behind the restaurant one finds the remains of a Norman motte and bailey. A public footpath is marked, which leads up onto the earthwork. The footpath starts at the end

of the carpark nearest to the restaurant. It is a very short climb onto the earthwork. The ground slopes gently upwards to a roughly circular area approximately 51ft. in diameter, which is the site of the maze. All that remains are a few odd bumps in the ground. It is a very attractive site which could be very much enhanced were the maze to be restored.

Leigh

Leigh is a small village in Dorset, 6 miles north west of Cerne Abbas. The maze site is in a field alongside the minor road from Leigh to Chetnole, on the right hand side of the road, at the top of a slight hill. A gate leads directly into the field and the maze site is ahead, on the highest point. Its hexagonal bank is still just discernable. It surrounds an area approximately 65ft. in diameter and the uneven ground within the bank is all that remains of the maze. This site is on private land but is easily accessible, if somewhat muddy after rain. There is a preservation order on the site, so restoration is a distinct possibility.

Marilyn Clark, Nottingham, 1992.