

## SAFFRON WALDEN'S FOUR PERMANENT MAZES

Saffron Walden has four permanent mazes open to the public. Two are historic and two are modern.

### The Turf Maze on the Common



*Photo Credit - Robert Talks*

This labyrinth is of great antiquity and importance. It is the largest example of a historic turf maze in the world and is one of only eight surviving turf mazes in England.

The earliest known reference to the maze is in a document of 1699, which refers to money being paid “for the cutting of the maze”. Restorations of the maze are recorded for 1826, 1841, 1859, 1887 and 1911, when the pathway was laid with bricks on edge. The most recent re-cutting was completed in 1979 when the bricks were re-laid flat.

The 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.

### The Hedge Maze, Bridge End Garden



*Photo Credit - Mark Ropkins*

The Hedge Maze was completed by Francis Gibson in about 1840. The earliest Ordnance Survey map of 1877 shows the Maze laid out in very similar manner to today. However, by 1950 it had been neglected because invading sycamore trees had become established and by 1980 it was completely overgrown with large trees.

In 1984, a programme of research and restoration was put in hand by Uttlesford District Council. The site was cleared and the original maze design marked out later that year. The paths were reconstructed, together with the banks which were subsequently planted with over 1000 yews. In 1991 the maze was officially re-opened by Mr. Anthony Fry, great-great grandson of Francis Gibson for the enjoyment and delight of future generations.

### **The Jubilee Garden Maze**



*Photo Credit - Peter Riding*

This labyrinth, centrally located in Jubilee Garden bandstand, was opened in 2013 at the second Maze Festival. The maze is made out of contrasting paving blocks laid over the existing concrete slab, which will permit its continued use for music performances and art exhibitions.

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 and beyond. The central octagon of the maze is decorated with a sleeping hare of semi-abstract design.

## The Swan Meadow Maze (under construction)



*Photo Credit - Peter Riding*

For the 2016 Maze Festival, with the support of UDC funding, grants from UDC ward councillors, the Town Council and Stansted Airport Passenger Community Fund as well as help from Ridgeons and Stonemarket Paving, John Ready has created a strikingly original permanent maze at Jacob's Green, Swan Meadow.

Within a perimeter fence of woven willow, the layout of box hedging and conservation paving announces on arrival that "Saffron Walden Amazes" and, as part of the child-friendly layout, a number of finger labyrinths and mazes are set into the top of pre-cast stone planters to provide further visitor interaction and illustrate how such designs have developed over the last 2,500 years. Pathways linking the two entry/exit points from the adjacent public footpath pass through a circular corner feature where a dramatic sculptural head overlooks the whole layout.