

UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL
SAFFRON WALDEN

SAFFRON WALDEN MAZE

TL 543 385

GRADE II

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

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Saffron Walden maze is thought to be of mediaeval 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 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.

SITE 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 (a 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 17 linked circles and has four linked outer horse-shoe 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

- Royal Commission on Historical Monuments in Essex*, i, 1916, p. 260
Matthews, W., 1922 *Mazes and Labyrinths*, pp. 82-4
Fisher, A., Coates, R., & Burgess, G., 1984 *A Celebration of Mazes*, 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

Description written October 2000, revised September 2001. Register inspector EMP