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## Notices of Ancient and Mediæval Labyrinths

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## NOTICES OF ANCIENT AND MEDIÆVAL LABYRINTHS.

THE Labyrinths of the classical age and the quaint devices of later times, the Mazes, of which they were the prototypes, present to the archaeologist a subject of investigation which hitherto has not received that degree of attention of which it appears so well deserving. I hope therefore that the following observations may meet with a favourable reception, not only as connected with our early studies of classical antiquity, but as illustrative of certain remarkable ecclesiastical usages in the Middle Ages, and possibly as recalling certain pleasurable reminiscences of gay disports or rural revelries associated with the Maze of more recent times, of which the latest and most familiar example is the verdant puzzle at Hampton Court.

Labyrinths may be divided into several distinct classes, comprising complicated ranges of caverns, architectural labyrinths or sepulchral buildings, tortuous devices indicated by coloured marbles or cut in turf, and topiary labyrinths or mazes formed by clipped hedges. I need scarcely observe that labyrinths are of exceedingly ancient origin, or that they have been used for the most varied purposes, viz., as catacombs for the burial of the dead, as prisons, as a means of performing penance, and as portions of pleasure-grounds.

Of the first class we may instance the labyrinth near Nauplia in Argolis, termed that of the Cyclops, and described by Strabo;<sup>1</sup> also the celebrated Cretan example, which from the observations of modern travellers is supposed to have consisted of a series of caves, resembling in some degree the catacombs of Rome or Paris. It has been questioned, however, whether such a labyrinth actually existed. Apollodorus and others state that it was built by Dædalus, near Cnossus,<sup>2</sup> in imitation of a more ancient labyrinth in Egypt, by the command of King Minos, and that it served first as

<sup>1</sup> Strabo, viii. 6, p. 369.

<sup>2</sup> The labyrinth, in various forms, occurs on the reverses of coins of Cnossus.

Montf. Ant. Exp., t. ii. pl. xii.; Smith's Dict. of Greek and Roman Geography, and Eckhel.

the prison of the monster Minotaur, and secondly as an architectural web wherein to enclose Dædalus himself, whence he was enabled to escape by the aid of artificial wings, the poetical representatives of sails, whose first use has been assigned to him. Ovid and Virgil, however, have both referred to the Cretan labyrinth as an architectural work :—

Dædalus ingenio fabræ celeberrimus artis  
 Ponit opus, turbatque notas, et lumina flexum  
 Ducit in errorem variarum ambage viarum.—

OVID. Met. viii., v. 159.

Ut quondam Cretâ fertur Labyrinthus in altâ  
 Parietibus textum cæcis iter, ancipitemque  
 Mille viis habuisse dolum, qua signa sequendi  
 Falleret indeprensus et inremeabilis error.—

ÆNEID, Lib. v., v. 588.

Of architectural labyrinths, the most extraordinary specimen was without doubt that at the southern end of the lake Mœris in Egypt, and about thirty miles from Arsinoe. Herodotus, who describes it very distinctly, says that none of the edifices of Greece could be compared with it either as to costliness or workmanship; that it consisted of twelve covered courts, 1500 subterranean chambers, in which the bodies of the Egyptian princes and the sacred crocodiles were interred, and of as many chambers above ground, which last only he was permitted to enter. He states that each court was surrounded by a colonnade of white stone beautifully built, that the walls were ornamented with bas-reliefs of various animals, that a lofty pyramid, 300 feet high, was raised at the angle where the labyrinth terminated, and that the whole work was encircled by a continuous wall. Pliny, Strabo, and Pomponius Mela, have also described this celebrated labyrinth, but they differ both as to the date of its construction and the purpose for which it was intended. Another labyrinth, built by the Æginetan architect, Smilis, in the island of Lemnos, was celebrated for the beauty of its columns, according to Pliny, who also alludes to one built by Theodorus at Samos.<sup>3</sup> The last example we may mention as belonging to this architectural class, intended, like the Pyramids of Egypt, to form a royal sepulchre capable of repelling the curiosity or acquisitive propensities of intruders,

<sup>3</sup> Pliny, Hist. Nat. xxxvi. c. 13.

was that built at Clusium, the modern Chiusi, in Etruria, by Lar Porsena, the noble, but baffled, foe of Rome; it is described by Pliny and Varro.

The Cretan Labyrinth is found on the reverses of coins of Cnossus, as also on Greek and Roman gems,<sup>4</sup> or at least what had become its conventional design, and it was occasionally represented upon the mosaic pavements of Roman halls. One specimen was drawn by Casanova at Pompeii, whose sinuous course, designated by coloured marbles, was surrounded by an embattled wall, strengthened at intervals by towers; and the design of another was found in the same city, scratched with a stylus upon a crimson-tinted column, accompanied by this inscription,—“Labyrinthus hic habitat Minotaurus,” a classical euphuism, we presume, for “Here lives a great beast.”<sup>5</sup>

But perhaps the most surprising fact connected with the mythological labyrinth is its acceptance by Christians, and its adaptation by the Church to a higher signification than it originally bore. First, it was used as an ornament on one of the state robes of the Christian emperors previously to the ninth century. In the “*Graphia aureæ urbis Romæ*,” published by A. F. Ozanam, pp. 92 and 178, in the “*Documents inédits pour servir à l’Histoire Littéraire de l’Italie*,” this rule regarding the emperor’s dress is given,—“*Habeat et in diarodino laberinthum fabrefactum ex auro et margaritis, in quo sit Minotaurus digitum ad os tenens ex smaragdo factus; quia sicut non valet quis laberinthum scrutare, ita non debet consilium dominatoris provalare.*” Next, it was adopted in all its details, including the Minotaur, by ecclesiastics, and was portrayed in churches. A design of this character still exists upon one of the porch piers of Lucca Cathedral, having the following inscription. (Fig. 1.)

HIC QUEM CRETICUS EDIT DEDALUS EST LABERINTHUS,  
DE QUO NULLUS VADERE QUIVIT QUI FUIT INTUS,  
NI THESEUS GRATIS ADRIANE STAMINE JUTUS.

This is of small dimensions, being only 1 foot  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches in diameter, and from the continual attrition it has received from thousands of tracing fingers, the central group of Theseus and the Minotaur has now been very nearly effaced.

<sup>4</sup> Maffei, *Gemme Ant.* iv. No. 31.

<sup>5</sup> Pompeia, par E. Breton, p. 303.

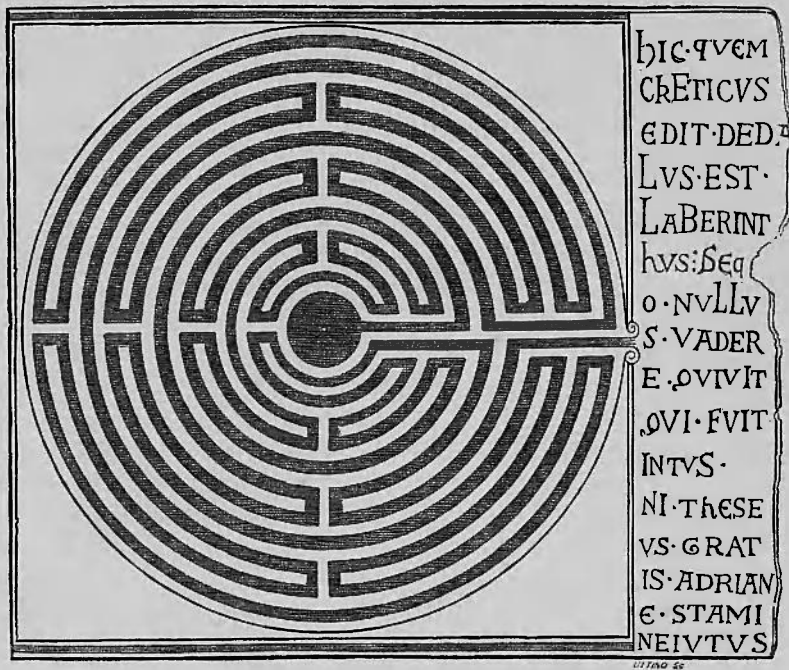


Fig. 1. LABYRINTH INCISED UPON ONE OF THE PORCH PIERS OF  
LUCCA CATHEDRAL.

Diameter, 19½ inches

(FROM DIDRON'S ANNALES ARCHEOLOGIQUES, TOME XVII.)

[To face page 218.]

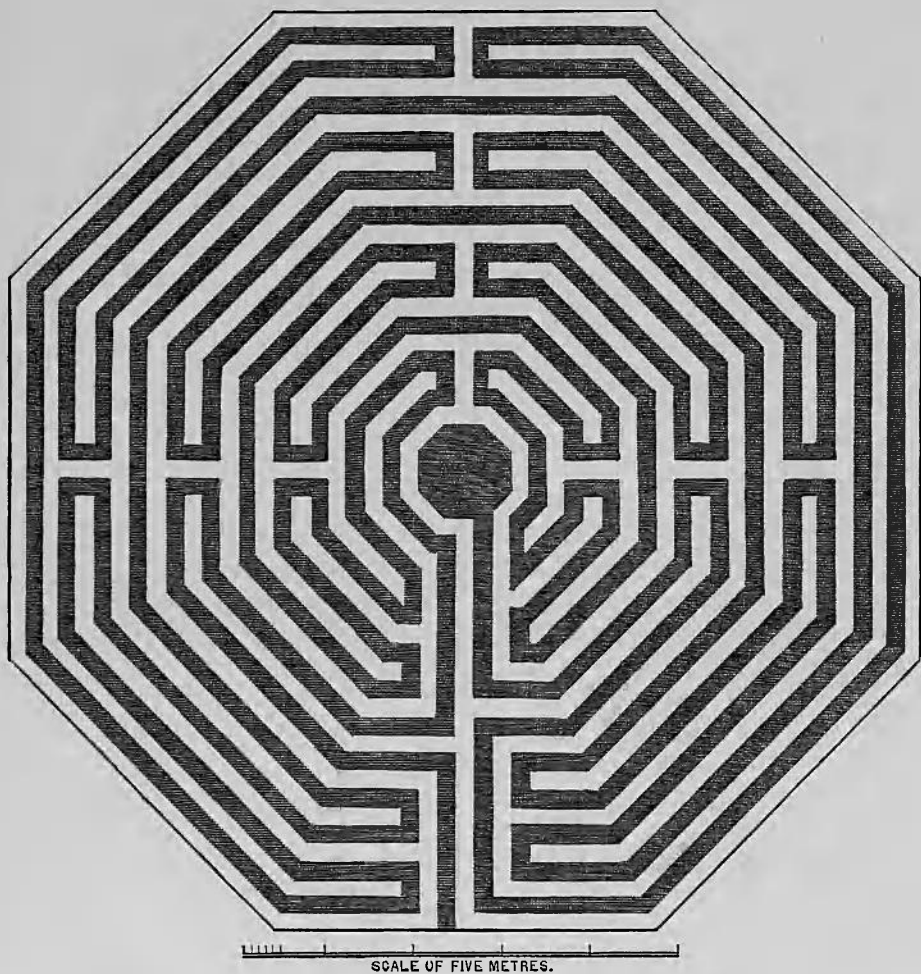


Fig. 2. LABYRINTHINE PAVEMENT AT THE ENTRANCE OF THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST. QUENTIN.

Diameter,  $34\frac{1}{2}$  feet.

(FROM WALLET'S DESCRIPTION D'UN PAVE MOSAIQUE A ST. OMER.)

[To face page 219.]



The whole device was deemed to be indicative of the complicated folds of sin by which man is surrounded, and how impossible it would be to extricate himself from them except through the assisting hand of Providence. Similar small designs of labyrinths, containing the figures of Theseus and the Minotaur, either exist or did exist, in the very ancient church of St. Michele at Pavia; at Aix in Provence; upon the walls of Poitiers Cathedral; in the Roman mosaic pavement found at Salzburg, now at Lachsenburg, and nearly resembling the Pompeian example alluded to above, as does another of very early date, discovered in a mosaic pavement of a Christian Basilica at Orleansville in Algeria. In this last, however, the words, *SANCTA ECCLESIA*, arranged in a complicated form in the centre, so as to correspond with the sinuosity of the labyrinth around them, take the place of the Minotaur, affording the first instance of an entirely new signification attributed to such works, whilst their designs remained the same as before.

In the church of Santa Maria in Aquiro, at Rome, are several portions of an extremely ancient pavement, the relics of a far earlier building than the present church. Amongst these is a small labyrinth, 1 foot  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches in diameter, composed of porphyry and yellow and green marbles, the central circle being of the first-named material.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps this is a work of the early part of the twelfth century, during which period such devices began to abound, and of these several are still preserved. One, 11 feet in diameter, exists near the sacristy of Santa Maria in Trastevere, at Rome, formed, in 1189, by a combination of different coloured marbles, and it is perhaps the most beautiful one still extant. Another, slightly larger, viz., 11 feet  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches, also composed of coloured marbles, is in the church of San Vitale, at Ravenna. An octagonal specimen,  $34\frac{1}{2}$  feet in diameter, is in the entrance of the parish church of St. Quentin, built during the twelfth century (fig. 2); and a precisely similar pavement was placed in the centre of Amiens Cathedral, in 1288, but of a rather larger size, measuring 42 feet across.<sup>7</sup> It was destroyed in 1825, but its

<sup>6</sup> This labyrinth is figured in M. Durand's memoir on "les Pavés Mosaïques," in Didron's *Annales Archéol.* vol. xvii., p. 119, with the other Italian examples here noticed.

<sup>7</sup> Wallet, in his "Description d'une Crypte et d'un Pave mosaïque de l'ancienne église de St. Bertin à Saint-Omer," Douai, 1843, p. 97, gives an account of the labyrinths in France, here



central compartment, still preserved in the Amiens Museum, consists of an octagonal grey marble slab, decorated with a brass or latten cross in the centre, between the limbs of which were ranged small figures of Evrart, Bishop of Amiens, the three architects of the cathedral, and four angels, cut in white marble, with a legend around the whole octagon, referring to the building of the fabric. Another labyrinth, 35 feet in diameter, and precisely like the foregoing, was constructed in the nave of Rheims Cathedral about 1240, but destroyed in 1779, by the desire of one of its canons, Jacquemart by name, who gave a considerable sum to effect this mischievous purpose. On its central stone were cut the figures of the architect and of the four masters of the works employed; this was also surrounded by a legend, like the Amiens labyrinth. An octagonal labyrinth,  $34\frac{1}{2}$  feet in diameter, composed of yellow and grey quarries, formed part of the pavement of the nave in Arras Cathedral, until the Revolution.

Before proceeding to instance more examples, we must here advert to another change in the signification of these curious works. The Church had adopted them as symbolical of herself; and when figures were designed in the centre of their manifold windings, such as those of deceased bishops, architects, or builders, ranged round a cross, instead of the actual words, *SANCTA ECCLESIA*, the same idea doubtless was intended to be conveyed, and the persons so represented were presumed to be resting in the bosom of the Church, as in an ark of salvation; but afterwards these labyrinths were made to serve another purpose, and received an entirely new name. This was when the period of the Crusades was drawing to a close, and when certain spots nearer home than Jerusalem began to be visited by pilgrims, instead of their actually resorting to Palestine; and a pilgrimage to our Lady of Loretto, to St. James of Compostella, or even to the shrine of St. Frideswide at Oxford, to that of St. Thomas of Canterbury or of St. Hugh of Lincoln, began to be looked upon as too great an exertion on the part of the faithful.

Then labyrinths became, as it is stated, instruments of performing penance for non-fulfilment of vows of pilgrimage to

enumerated, with representations of those at St. Quentin and Chartres, and of the central octagon of that at Amiens. See also notices of the Amiens pavement in

Daire, *Hist. de la Ville d'Amiens*, tom. ii., and the *Bulletin du Com. Hist.* No. x., p. 240.



Fig. 3. LABYRINTH IN THE NAVE OF CHARTRES CATHEDRAL.

Diameter, 30 feet.

(FROM WALLEY'S DÉSCRIPTION D'UN PAVÉ MOSAÏQUE À ST. OMER.)

[To face page 221.]

the Holy Land, and were called "*Chemins de Jerusalem*," as being emblematical of the difficulties attending a journey to the real Jerusalem, or of those encountered by the Christian before he can reach the heavenly Jerusalem; whence the centre of these curious designs was not unfrequently termed "*Ciel*." And, finally, they were used as a means of penance for sins of omission and commission in general; penitents being ordered to follow out all the sinuous courses of these labyrinths upon their hands and knees, to repeat so many prayers at fixed stations, and others when they reached the central "*Ciel*," which in several cases took a whole hour to effect, whence these works, as stated by M. Wallet, were not unfrequently termed "*La lieue*." Unfortunately, many of them have now been destroyed, not a few wantonly during the Revolution, but others because strangers and children by noisily tracking out their tortuous paths, occasioned disturbance during divine service, as in the instance of the next example to which I shall allude. This is a square one, formerly in the Abbey Church of St. Bertin at St. Omer. The design is preserved by a drawing supposed to have been the work of some student of the English college at that town during the last century, having this inscription below, "*Entré du chemin de Jérusalem autre fois marqué sur le carreau de l'Eglise de St. Bertin*." It appears to have been composed of black and yellow tiles.<sup>8</sup> A large circular labyrinth, composed of grey and white marble, having an escalloped border, and a sexagonal cusped circle in the centre, exists in the middle of the nave of Chartres Cathedral. (Fig. 3.) It is 30 feet in diameter, and its path is 668 feet long. At Sens there was another of the same size, formed by lines filled in with lead, and recorded to have required 2000 steps to reach the centre; and in the chapter house of Bayeux Cathedral is an exceedingly beautiful work of this description, 12 feet in diameter, formed of circles of tiles, adorned with shields, griffins, and fleurs-de-lis, and separated from one another by bands of small plain black tiles.

Occasionally something more than the actual path of the life present was attempted to be represented in these works. On a small labyrinth cut upon the pavement beneath the organ of the church of Notre Dame at St. Omer, the winding

<sup>8</sup> Wallet, Description, *ut supra*, p. 97, where this pavement is figured. The labyrinth at Chartres is noticed by De Caumont in his "*Abecedaire*."

path towards the central Jerusalem is strangely mixed up with towns, rivers, mountains, and animals, intended probably to shadow forth the refreshments and the difficulties which all Christian pilgrims may expect to meet with on their journey through life towards that heavenly city which they are seeking. This is confirmed by the following inscription, once attached possibly to a labyrinthine design, and now preserved in the Museum of Lyons :—

HOC SPECULO · SPECULARE LEGENS · QUOD  
 SIS MORITURUS : QUOD CINIS IMMO LUTUM  
 QUOD VERMIBUS ESCA FUTURUS ; SED TA  
 MEN UT SEMPER VIVAS · MALE VIVERE VITA :  
 XPM QUESO ROGA · SIT UT IN XPO MEA VITA :  
 ME CAPUT APRIL' · EX HOC RAPUIT LABERINTO :  
 PREBITUM · DOCEO VERSU MA FUNERA QNTO :  
 STEPHANUS · FECIT OC.<sup>9</sup>

Allegorical designs of spiritual labyrinths were in vogue until the third quarter of the last century : a long title to the following effect accompanies an engraving of one produced at Lyons in 1769, from a drawing by M. Belion :— A spiritual labyrinth watered by four channels of grace, representing, First, the four rivers of the terrestrial paradise and the happy condition of man before the Fall. Secondly, by the different windings that may be seen are intended to be shown the miseries with which human life abounds since the Fall. Thirdly, from this labyrinth, terminating at the same point where it commenced, we are taught that as man was formed of earth he will return to his first element by the corruption of his body. Fourthly, the wholesome water of these channels represents the grace of God, through which a remedy is supplied for a corrupted nature.

I am not aware of the existence of a single specimen of an ecclesiastical labyrinth in any church in England, but we possess numerous works of this description cut in the turf of our rural greens, and some are of the same patterns as those of the foreign examples mentioned above worked on pavements or walls. These turf-mazes have been usually termed "Troy-towns," or "Julian's Bowers," but improperly, because such names apparently point to a very remote, or at least to

<sup>9</sup> See No. 273 in the Description du Musée Lapidaire de la Ville de Lyon, par le Dr. A. Comarmond.

a classical period, whereas the works so styled are without doubt mediæval.

The reign of Elizabeth was productive of a love for material subtleties, and for allegorical figures of speech, which, from that Queen's classical attainments, very usually took a classical form. "Troy-town," and all the difficulties of its capture, would then form a tempting subject for one of those embryo dramas so frequently enacted in her presence; whilst "Julian's Bower" would be an appropriate term for a court masque, in which a bevy of courtiers and fair dames, issuing from some verdant concealment, might affect to imitate the evolutions of the little Iulus and his companions in their martial sport, as described by Virgil,—

Inde alios ineunt cursus, aliosque recursus  
Adversis spatiis, alternosque orbibus orbes  
Impediunt, pugnæque cient simulacra sub armis :  
Et nunc terga fugâ nudant, nunc spicula vertunt  
Infensi, facta pariter nunc pace feruntur.—ÆN. Lib. v. 583.

Whence any complicated figures, either traced by the feet of dancers or cut on the ground, might possibly acquire a synonymous appellation during the reign of the great Tudor Queen, and retain it to the present time. This conventional term was a most unfortunate cause of delusive speculations to Stukeley, as he was thereby completely led off from the origin of such turf-mazes to pursue an illusion, with all the ardour of his vivid imagination, fully believing that he had discovered a still-existing Roman reminiscence on our British soil. He says, in reference to the frequent occurrence of places called Julian's Bower, or Troy-town, both at Roman towns and other localities, especially in Lincolnshire:—"Upon a little reflection I concluded that this is the ancient Roman game; and it is admirable that both name and thing should have continued through such a diversity of people. As to the name *Bower* it signifies not an arbour or pleasant shady retirement in this place; but *Borough*, or any work made with ramparts of earth, as camps and the like. . . . The name of *Julian* undoubtedly refers to *Iulus* the son of Æneas, who first brought it into Italy."<sup>1</sup> The continued study of archæology, however, now so widely pursued, and the easy means of travelling abroad as well as

<sup>1</sup> Stukeley, *Itinerarium Curiosum*, Iter v. p. 97.

at home, have brought many hidden things to light which before were either obscure or entirely concealed; whilst truth, in many instances veiled with a fictitious covering of old, now stands revealed in all her natural purity.

Ancient turf-mazes either exist or are known to have existed in Scotland and Wales as well as in England, whilst shepherds and other persons are still in the habit of re-cutting these, or occasionally forming new ones, copied from more ancient designs, handed down from a remote period. Such works were to be seen in Strathmore and other parts of North Britain; they occurred likewise in Wales, where they were termed "Caerdroia," or Troy-walls, allusion to which is made in "Drych y Prif Oesoedd" and other Welsh histories, and they have been found in various localities throughout England, namely in the vicinity of the Solway, Cumberland;<sup>2</sup> at Ripon and Asenby in Yorkshire; at Alkborough, Louth, Appleby, and Horncastle in Lincolnshire; at Sneinton and Clifton in Notts; at Wing and Lyddington, in Rutland; on Boughton-Green, in Northamptonshire; at Comberton, Cambridgeshire, called "the Mazles"; at Hilton, Hunts; Dunstable, Bedfordshire; Saffron Walden, Essex; Winchester, Hants; West Ashton, Wilts; on the Cotswold Hills, Gloucestershire; at Pimpern, and at Leigh in Yetminster, Dorset. The latter is called the "Miz-Maze." I will now refer more particularly to some of these.

The first which I shall notice is the maze that formerly existed in Yorkshire on Ripon Common: it was ploughed up in 1827, but its plan having been fortunately preserved by Mr. J. Tuting, sen., of Ripon, I am able to exhibit its form (see fig. 4). It was 20 yards in diameter, and its path was 407 yards long.

Another maze, precisely resembling this Ripon specimen, may still be seen in the same locality, namely, at Asenby, in the parish of Topcliffe, and it is preserved with very laudable care at the expense of the parish, and I trust will continue to meet with such attention. It is slightly smaller than the maze formerly to be seen at Ripon, being 17 yards in diameter, and its path is 336 yards long.

Another may be seen at Alkborough, Lincolnshire, over-

<sup>2</sup> The herdsmen still cut on the grassy plains of Burgh and Rockliff marshes, a labyrinthine figure, termed the Walls of

Troy.—Notes and Queries, Ser. ii. vol. v. p. 212.





Fig. 5. MAZE AT ALKBOROUGH, LINCOLNSHIRE. Diameter, 44 feet.



Fig. 6. MAZE AT WING, RUTLANDSHIRE. Diameter, 40 feet.

[To face page 224.]





Fig. 7. MAZE AT BOUGHTON GREEN, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE. Diameter, 37 feet.

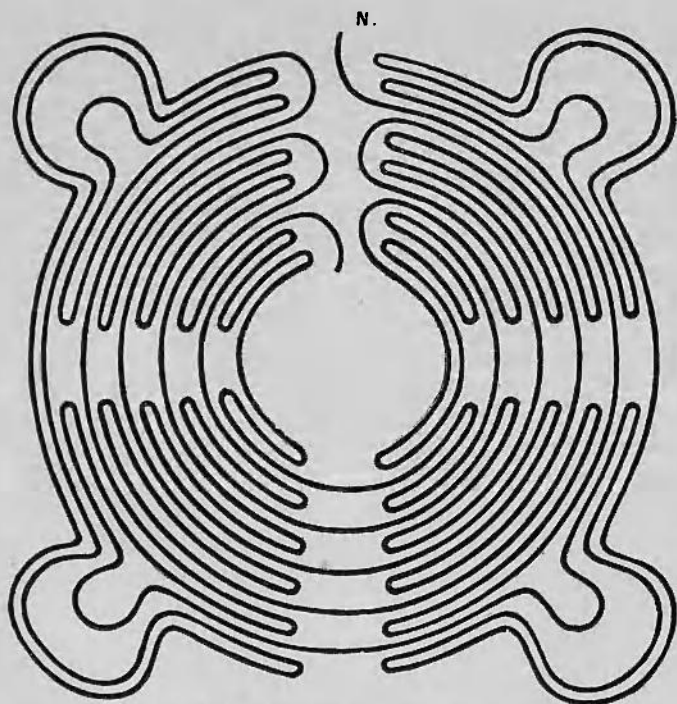


Fig. 9. MAZE AT SAFFRON WALDEN, ESSEX. Diameter, 110 feet.

[To face page 224.]

looking the Humber. This is 44 feet in diameter, and the remarkable resemblance between its plan and that designed on marble at Lucca will be at once perceived. (See Fig. 5.) The next example (Fig. 6) is on the outskirts of the village of Wing, near Uppingham, Rutlandshire; it is 40 feet in diameter, and belongs to the same class as the preceding maze.



Fig. 4. Maze formerly existing on Ripon Common.

Diameter, 60 feet.

Fig. 7 is cut on Boughton Green, in Northamptonshire, so celebrated for its fair; it is 37 feet in diameter.

Fig. 8 is remarkable for the addition of projecting features to the circular centre, which gives quite a different character to its plan, and still more so on account of the cross-cross-lets fitchy cut within those projections. It formerly existed on a hill near St. Anne's Well, in the lordship of Sneinton,

about a mile distant from Nottingham. Its diameter was 17 yards, exclusive of the projecting portions, and the length of its sinuous pathway was 535 yards. It was termed the "Shepherd's Maze," and "Robin Hood's Race," but it was unfortunately ploughed up in 1797.

Fig. 9 nearly resembles the last. It is cut on the common adjoining Saffron Walden, Essex, and is 110 feet in diameter. There is a local tradition that this is a copy of another and more ancient maze, which was imitated by a soldier, but probably the soldier only re-cut the old design; certain it is, however, that a maze has existed on the Saffron Walden common, such as is represented, for a very long period, as testified by local records.<sup>3</sup>

Fig. 10 presents a totally new and very complicated design to our notice. It formerly existed in the parish of Pimpern, near Blandford in Dorsetshire, and covered nearly an acre of ground, but it was ploughed up in 1730. It was formed of small ridges, about a foot high,<sup>4</sup>

Fig. 11 is an example of a quadrangular maze, 86 feet square, also cut in turf like the preceding specimens. It is on St. Catherine's Hill, in the parish of Chilcombe near Winchester, and is known by the name of the "Mize-Maze." Having become very indistinct, it was re-cut by the present Warden of Winchester, with the aid of a plan that had been fortunately preserved by a lady in the vicinity. It has been thus alluded to in the Rev. J. Warton's "Mons Catherinæ:"—

Aut aliquis tereti ductos in margine gyros  
 Suspiciens, miratur inextricabile textum;  
 Sive illic Lemurum populus sub nocte choreas  
 Plausurit exiguas, viridesque attriverit herbas;  
 Sive olim pastor fidos descripserit ignes,  
 Verbaque difficili composita reliquerit orbe,  
 Confusasque notas, impressaque cespite vota.

It will be remarked that there is a very strong degree of similarity between the six circular designs given, of which, however, one is cut on marble in an Italian cathedral, and the other five are cut in turf on the green-sward of as many different English counties. This fact, in addition to the great skill requisite to trace such complicated devices upon

<sup>3</sup> The representation given in Camden, edit. Gough, 1806, vol. ii, pl. xiv. p. 400, appears very incorrect: a tree stands in the centre.

<sup>4</sup> This representation is reduced from the plate in Hutchins' Dorset, vol. i. p. 100, first edit., drawn by J. Bastard, 1758.



Fig. 10. MAZE FORMERLY EXISTING AT PIMPERN, DORSET.

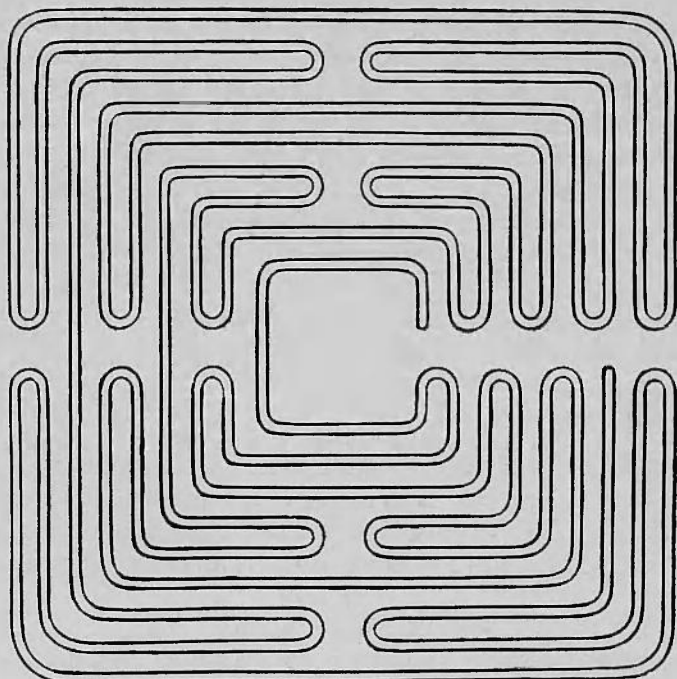


Fig. 11. THE MIZE-MAZE, ON ST. CATHERINE'S HILL, WINCHESTER  
Diameter, 86 feet.

[To face page 225.]

very limited spaces, at once negatives the idea that any of them could have been originally the handywork of some local shepherd. Denying, therefore, their pastoral, as well as their presumed Roman origin, it now remains to be suggested, by whom they were created, for what purpose, and at what period. So far, I believe questions on these points would have been asked in vain, but France has lately presented a clue by which we may be guided to the solution of some of the difficulties connected with turf labyrinths. On comparing the English specimens with those in French mediæval churches, and the maze at Alkborough in particular with the example before noticed in Sens Cathedral, the respective designs are almost identical, and there could scarcely remain a doubt that both had an ecclesiastical origin, had no other evidence been forthcoming. Moreover, this supposition is strengthened by another circumstance, namely, that most, if not all, of our English turf-mazes are situated in the vicinity either of a church or chapel, or in localities where it may appear probable that some sacred structure once existed.

The Alkborough specimen is within a short distance of the parish church of that village, as is that at Wing. That on Boughton Green, although now in a remote spot, is near the ruins of the original parish church of St. John, first built by the Abbot of St. Wandregesile in Normandy. That at Sneinton was close to the chapel of St. Anne, built in 1409, some traces of which still exist in the foundations of a modern house now occupying its site.<sup>5</sup> This maze seems to have puzzled the learned historian of Nottingham, Dr. Deering, who, although rejecting Stukeley's opinion as to the Roman origin of such works, and inclined to attribute them to ecclesiastics, gives the following ludicrous reason for their formation: — "Might I offer my conjecture, I should think this open maze was made by some of the priests belonging to St. Anne's chappel, who being confined so far as not to venture out of sight and hearing, contrived this *to give themselves a breathing for want of other exercise.*"<sup>6</sup> The Winchester maze also was near the ancient chapel of St. Catherine, of which mention is made in the episcopal registers in conjunction with the parish church of Chilcombe.

<sup>5</sup> Deering's Nottingham, sect. 4, p. 73.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

It appears possible, therefore, that some of these works may have been originally created as a means of performing penance, and not for purposes of amusement, and that they were designed by ecclesiastics, and not by Romans of old, nor by shepherds and others of later years. This supposition is illustrated by the accompanying engraving, taken from a drawing by a talented lady, Mrs. Robert Miles, which represents the ecclesiastics of St. Anne's chapel, adjoining the well of that name, at prayer in their penitential labyrinth.

After the Reformation, however, these rural mazes were certainly converted into a medium of recreation, as referred to in several passages of Shakspeare :—

The nine men's morris is fill'd up with mud ;  
And the quaint *mazes* on the wanton green,  
For lack of tread, are undistinguishable.—

MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM, Act 2, Scene 2.

My old bones ache : here's a *maze* trod indeed,  
Through forth-rights and meanders ! by your patience  
I needs must rest me.—TEMPEST, Act 3, Scene 3.

Another class of labyrinths still remains to be noticed, viz., the Topiary, consisting of those formed by clipped hedges of yew, holly, or hornbeam, enclosing a puzzling series of winding paths, one of which alone conducts to a small open space in the centre. These works, the joint production of nature and man, were known to the Romans, and are alluded to by Pliny,<sup>7</sup> whilst the romantic history of Rosamond Clifford may readily remind us of their existence in England at an early period. The maze at Woodstock, in which she was for a time concealed by Henry II. from the sight of his young queen, Eleanor of Aquitaine, had probably formed part of the "Plaisance" adjoining the royal palace, long before it was adapted for the reception of the fair object of Henry's love. In the reigns of Henry VIII. and Elizabeth mazes were much in vogue, and there must then have been a frequent demand for fabricators of verdant subtilities, a maze formed by neatly clipped hedges being an usual adjunct to the royal residences, and probably also to those of the nobility. These, I believe, are now for the most part destroyed, but their past existence is indicated by

<sup>7</sup> Hist. Nat. xxxvi. 13.



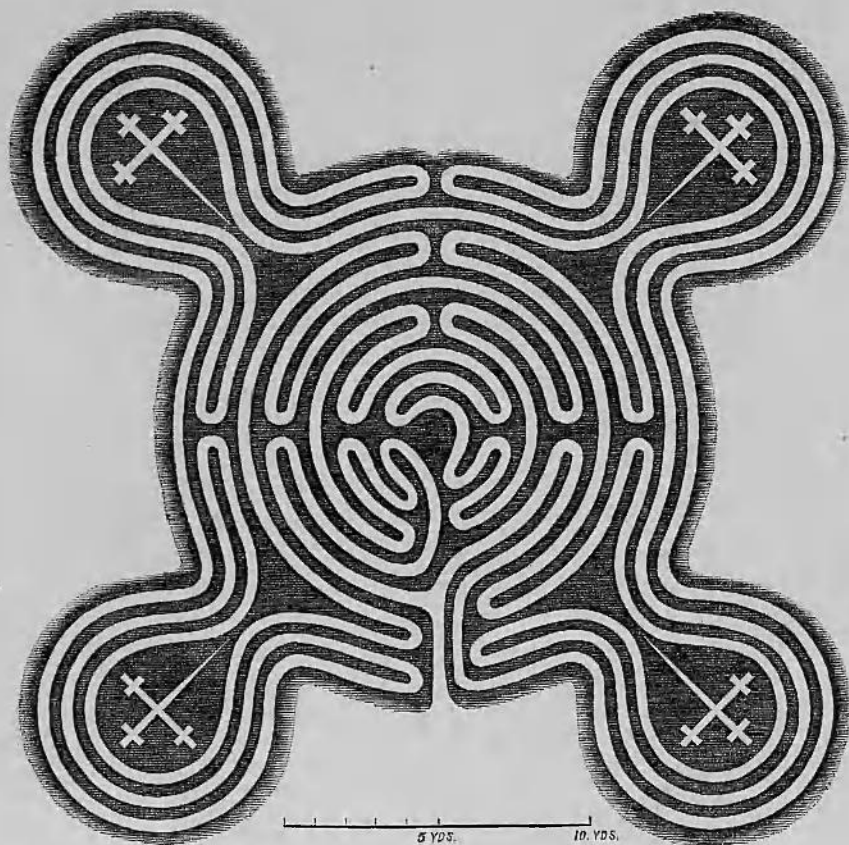


Fig. 8. MAZE FORMERLY EXISTING NEAR ST. ANN'S WELL,  
SNEINTON, NOTTINGHAMSHIRE.

Diameter, 51 feet.

[To face page 224.]





The Maze near St. Anne's Chapel, Sneinton, Nottinghamshire, from a drawing by Mrs. Robert Miles,

the retention of the name Maze in the vicinity of the spots they had once occupied, such as The Maze in Southwark, marking the site of the Princess Mary Tudor's residence, alluded to by Miss Strickland in her *Lives of the Queens of England*,<sup>8</sup> and Maze Hill, at Greenwich, once supplied with a similar means of amusing the royal inmates of the adjoining palace. Artists, moreover, whose names are of high repute in the development of the pictorial and other arts, did not deem it beneath them to devise plans for these intricate verdant bowers. Holbein designed one, a print of which was exhibited at the late Manchester Exhibition, accompanied by a Latin and a German poetical inscription, whence it appeared that it was intended to represent the mythical work of Dædalus. Tintoretto, likewise, painted a labyrinth, which may be seen in Hampton Court Palace.<sup>9</sup> I here give two plans of verdant mazes of the sixteenth century, one, Fig. 12, from the old palace of Theobalds, Herts; and another, Fig. 13, taken from an Italian work on architecture, by Serlio.<sup>1</sup> Labyrinths of this description continued to abound during the seventeenth century in Italy, France, Germany, and Holland, but they were discarded from England by the refined taste of the times of Charles I. and Charles II., whose artistic garden-terraces, adorned with groups of well-chosen sculpture, and fair lawns enlivened with embroidery of skilfully contrasted flowers, could not admit the propinquity of so puerile a conceit as a gloomy mass of hedges, affecting to represent the mighty architectural designs

<sup>8</sup> Vol. i., p. 318. The manor of "Le Mase," Southwark, is so termed in 1 Henr. VI. when it belonged to Sir John Burcestre. See the account of it given in Coll. Top. vol. viii. p. 253. The memory of its site still exists in the names Maze Lane and Maze Pond. Green, the Dramatist, mentions the "Maze in Tuttle," supposed to have been in Tothill Fields.

<sup>9</sup> This painting is now in the Queen's Private Chamber, at Hampton Court, and it is marked No. 787, in the Strangers' Guide, published in 1857. In a letter to M. Didron, cited in M. Durand's *Memoir on Mosaic Pavements*, *Annales*, tome xvii. p. 127, it is stated that in the collection of the Marquis Campana at Rome was to be seen a painting of the sixteenth century, on panel, representing the story of Theseus, with a labyrinth which closely

resembled that in the church of Santa Maria in Aquiro at Rome, figured by M. Durand in that memoir.

<sup>1</sup> "Seb. Serlio, *Libri cinque d'Architettura*," Venet. 1551, fol., but the books appeared separately, commencing in 1537. This work was translated into French, by J. Martin, Paris and Antwerp, 1545-50, also into Dutch, and in 1611 into English. A copy of that translation, a folio volume of considerable rarity, exists in the library of my friend, the Rev. W. Thornton, at Dodford, Northamptonshire. A remarkable example of the topiary maze formerly existed at the Château de Gaillon. In the *Architectural Works of Du Cerceau*, who lived in the reigns of Charles IX. and Henry III. (1560-89) there is scarcely a ground-plot without a square and a round labyrinth.

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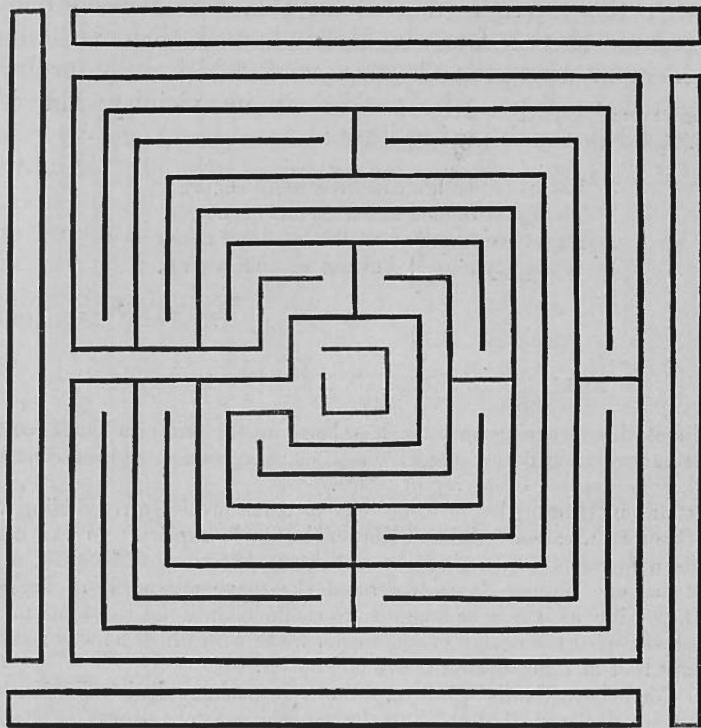


Fig. 12. MAZE AT THEOBALDS, HERTFORDSHIRE.

of the ancient monarchs of Egypt, Crete, or Etruria. Clement X., who ordered a maze to be made at the Villa Altieri, is reported to have amused himself with the perplexities of his attendants when consigned to its folds, formed of thick and high box-trees.<sup>2</sup> Gabriel planned one for the palace of Choisi in France, and the celebrated Le Nôtre another for that of Chantilly, during the abovenamed period. The passion for these verdant marvels was again resumed through the example of William III., who formed one at his palace of the Loo, in Holland, and that well-known specimen at Hampton Court, a work which very probably suggested to Pope, who resided in its vicinity, the idea expressed in the following lines :—

Let us (since life can little more supply  
Than just to look about us and to die),  
Expatriate free o'er all this scene of man,  
A mighty maze ! but not without a plan.

EDWARD TROLLOPE.

#### ADDITIONAL NOTES ON MAZES IN ENGLAND.

Whilst the foregoing memoir has been in the printer's hands, certain particulars relating to the subject under consideration have been communicated, which appear deserving of notice.

At Hilton, Huntingdonshire, there is a maze precisely resembling that at Alkborough, called "Julian's Bower" (fig. 5, *supra*). In the centre stands a stone pillar, bearing inscriptions in Latin and in English, to the effect that one William Sparrow formed the maze around it in the year 1660, possibly as it may be imagined to commemorate the Restoration. He doubtless copied the design of some older maze with which he was familiar, perhaps that in Lincolnshire, above mentioned.

At Comberton, Cambridgeshire, there exists a maze called "The Mazles," almost identical with that at Wing, Rutlandshire (fig. 6, *supra*). The path is of gravel, 2 feet wide ; its windings are separated from each other by little trenches nine inches wide. The diameter of the circle is 50 feet, and the outer margin is on a level with the surrounding ground, but the area of the maze gradually sinks towards its centre.

Mr. Wright, in a note in his *History of Essex*, vol. ii. p. 124, states that "it has been a custom from time immemorial among the villagers, to hold a feast at this spot every three years about the time of Easter. It would seem most probable that such works originally served for some religious ceremony among the Britons, to whom they are generally attributed, as among all the ancient systems the labyrinth was a sacred symbol."

<sup>2</sup> See the letter from M. B. de Montault in Didron's *Annales*, tome xvii. p. 127, note. An engraving of this labyrinth

exists, executed in the seventeenth century.

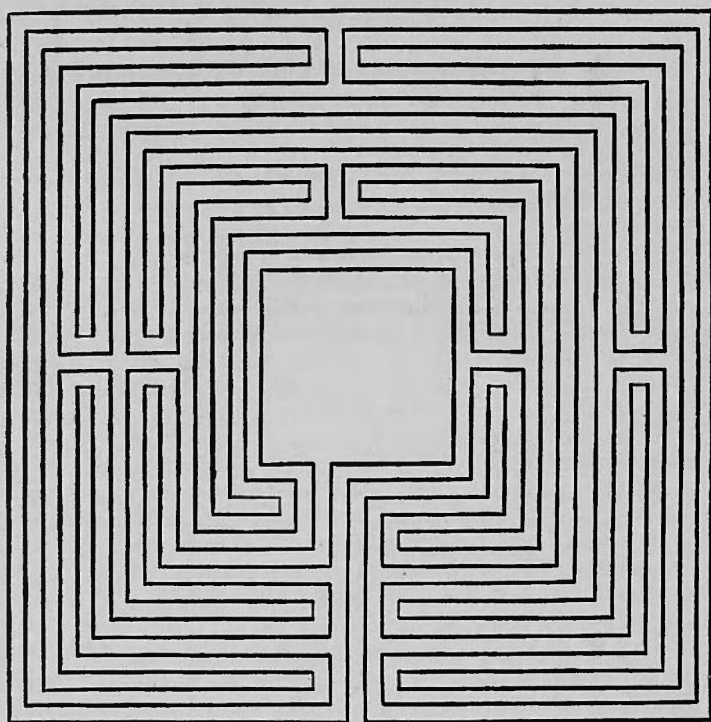


Fig. 13. ITALIAN MAZE, FROM SERLIO, LIBRI CINQUE D'ARCHITETTURA, 1537.

[To face page 228.]

It is remarkable that mazes formed on turf appear to be unknown on the Continent. Enquiry has been made in vain to ascertain the occurrence of any example. The learned French archaeologist, however, M. Didron, whose instructive and admirably illustrated "Annales" comprise almost every subject within the range of antiquarian investigation, promises to give a memoir with engravings, the result of the researches of M. Bonnin of Evreux, who has succeeded in collecting not less than two hundred examples of all periods and all countries. Amongst these, probably, some foreign maze, traced on turf like those in England, may be found. See the notes to M. Durand's interesting paper on "Les Pavés-mosaïques," before cited, and published in the *Annales Archeologiques*, tome xvii. p. 127.

No example of the maze appears to have been noticed as existing in Surrey; Aubrey, however, in his *History of that County*, vol. v. p. 80, observes that there were many mazes in England before the civil wars, and that the young people used on festivals to dance upon them, or as the term was, to tread them. A very keen observer of early vestiges in Surrey, Mr. H. L. Long, states that in his remembrance there existed a maze termed "a Troy Town," cut on Hillbury, between Farnham and Guildford. The writer of the Query regarding labyrinths cut on the turf by Welsh shepherds in former days, and called *Caerdroia*, Walls or Citadel of Troy, in commemoration, it has been believed, of the Trojan origin of the Britons, asserts that at the present time herdsmen on the grassy plains of Burgh and Rockliff Marshes near the Solway, in Cumberland, cut a labyrinthine figure on the turf, which they call the Walls of Troy. (*Notes and Queries*, Series ii. vol. v. p. 211). In Scotland, as we are informed by Mr. Joseph Robertson, the "Walls of Troy" are still popular amongst children, who trace the maze on the sea-sand, or draw it on their school-slates. Topiary mazes there formed a feature of old pleasure-grounds, as in the south. As a device, he notices the labyrinth to be seen incised on the stone bench in one of the window recesses of the hall at Craigmillar Castle. The obscure allusion to Troy was retained, it must be observed, until comparatively recent times, since amongst the topiary and other works laid out at Kensington Palace by London and Wise, the celebrated designers of gardens in the reign of William III., the curious upper garden known as the "Siege of Troy" was long celebrated. Some antiquaries have supposed that a certain connexion may have subsisted between the so-called "Troy Town" and the *Ludus Trojæ*, or Troy Game, a favourite martial exercise in early mediæval times, which has been regarded as having been the origin of tournaments. There may have been a resemblance between this disport and the warlike exercises of *lulus* described by Virgil, as cited in the foregoing memoir. See regarding the *Ludus Trojæ*, Meyrick's *Critical Enquiry*, vol. ii., pp. 79, 83, 125; Bohn's edition.

This game, it may be observed, had certainly been handed down from a period long anterior to mediæval times. Nero, as we learn from Suetonius, was accustomed in his youth to play at Troy,—"*Trojam lusit*;" and the same writer, in his treatise, "*De lusibus puerorum*," observes, that the "*Lusus quem vulgo Pyrricham appellant Troja vocatur*."

Many localities, doubtless, in England have preserved the names of Troy Town and Julian's Bower, besides those already mentioned. In Gough's edition of Camden's *Britannia*, vol. i., p. 73, it is said that the maze at Pimpern, Dorset, bore the designation of Troy Town; and another place so called is found in the same county, north-east of Beer Regis. In Kent,



a place of the same name occurs near Westerham, and other instances will be familiar to our readers.

It has been observed in the previous memoir that the Topiary maze appears to have been in fashion amongst the Romans, by whom decorations of clipped evergreens in gardens were carried to great perfection, the *Topiarius*, or ornamental gardener, being mentioned by Cicero and other writers. Pliny recommends various shrubs as suitable for such purposes, especially the laurel called *Taxa*, very fit for green arbours and to be wrought into knots; as also the Alexandrine laurel, the cypress, and the box, well suited to be formed into borders and hedges, kept orderly with clipping and cutting. Nat. Hist. B. xv. c. 30; B. xvi. c. 16, 33, &c. Whether any labyrinthine figures were actually thus formed in the gardens of the Romans may appear questionable, but if the *Ars Topiaria* were not called into requisition for such works, it seems certain that mazes resembling some in our own country were not unknown. Pliny, speaking of the great extent and intricacy of the Cretan labyrinth, observes (as translated by Holland), "neither must we think that these turnings and returnings were after the manner of mazes which are drawn upon the pavement and plain floor of a field (ut in pavimentis puerumve ludicris campestribus videmus) such as we commonly see serve to make sport and pastime among boys, that is to say, which within a little compass and a round border comprehend many miles," &c. B. xxxvi. c. 13. See the article *Hortus*, in Smith's Dictionary of Antiquities, and the Epistle of the younger Pliny, in which he describes his Tuscan villa, with its *hippodromus*, explained to have been a kind of circus, consisting of several paths divided by hedges of box, and ornamented with topiary work. Pliny, Epist. lib. v. ep. 6.

It may be difficult, if not impracticable, to ascertain what is the most ancient instance of a labyrinth, of whatever description, in the British Islands. An ancient earthwork on Wick Down Hill, near Downton, Wiltshire, described by Sir Richard Colt Hoare in his *Ancient Wilts*, vol. i. p. 231, as a Maze, "has the appearance of a low barrow surrounded by circles within circles." There are tumuli in the neighbourhood. It is to be regretted that no plan is given of this curious work.

Mention has been made of the earliest labyrinth, so designated, familiar to us in English history, namely, Rosamond's Bower at Woodstock. It is, however, very doubtful of what description this may have been. Drayton, in a note to his "Epistle of Rosamond," says that her labyrinth was formed of arched and walled vaults underground, but Gough observes that the poet gives no authority for the assertion. See Preface to Gough's Brit. Topog. p. xxx. Such vaults might have existed in Drayton's time, but they did not prove that there had not been any superstructure. According to Bromton, indeed, Rosamond's labyrinth at Woodstock should be numbered amongst those of the Architectural class. He says of her, "Huic nempe puellæ spectatissimæ fecerat rex apud Wodestoke mirabilis architecturæ cameram operi Dædalino similem, ne forsan a regina deprehenderetur." Script. decem, col. 1151. Knyghton uses the same words, with the exception only of the expression, "*Operi Dædalino sinuatam.*" Ibid, col. 2395.

Henry, abbot of Clairvaux, has been supposed to allude to mazes, such as have been figured in the foregoing memoir, when, writing allegorically of being entangled in a labyrinth, he observes, "non habent



certos aditus, semitas ambulans circularis, et in quodam fraudium labyrintho monstra sævissima reconduuntur." See Hoveden, ed. Savile, p. 577, under the year 1178. It is obvious, however, that the writer may have had in his thoughts merely the traditional forms of the Cretan labyrinth.

Of the frequent use of mazes in later times and the varied fashions of their design, illustrations might be easily multiplied. It has already been observed that the maze had been much in vogue as a feature of pleasure grounds in the sixteenth century: one at Theobalds, Herts, built by Burleigh about 1560, has been figured in the foregoing memoir. Books of practical instruction for planning such works were published at that time, and the following has been specially cited: "The Gardener's Labyrinth, by Dydymus Mountaine. Wherein are set forth divers herbers, knottes, and mazes, cunningly handled for the beautifying of gardens." 4to. 1577. Evelyn enumerates "labyrinths, dædals, cabinets," &c., amongst the numerous topiary and other works in his scheme for a Royal Garden. (Memoirs, vol. iii. p. 435.) In the popular cyclopedia of country occupations, the "Maison Rustique," by Charles Estienne and Liebault, published at Paris in 1582, a figure of a square "Dædalus" is given amongst the plans for laying out gardens, and it is copied in the translation by Richard Surflet, entitled "The Country Farme." See Gervase Markham's edition, London, 1616, p. 276, where "The forme of a Labyrinth" will be found.

The topiary maze appears to have been sometimes termed a Wilderness, as at Hampton Court and elsewhere. The author of the Account of several Gardens near London, in 1691, commends "the very pretty maze or Wilderness" at Lord Fauconbergh's garden at Sutton Court, near Chiswick. *Archæologia*. vol. xii. p. 184. The Wilderness at Hampton Court, with the compartment laid out as a maze, the design of which may be seen in Jesse's Hampton Court, p. 77, was part of the gardens laid out there for William III. by London and Wise, about 1690. See further on this subject Walpole's observations on Modern Gardening, in his *Anecdotes of Painting in England*.

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The Institute is indebted to the kindness of the Author of the foregoing Memoir for the greater part of the illustrations by which it is accompanied.