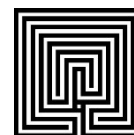


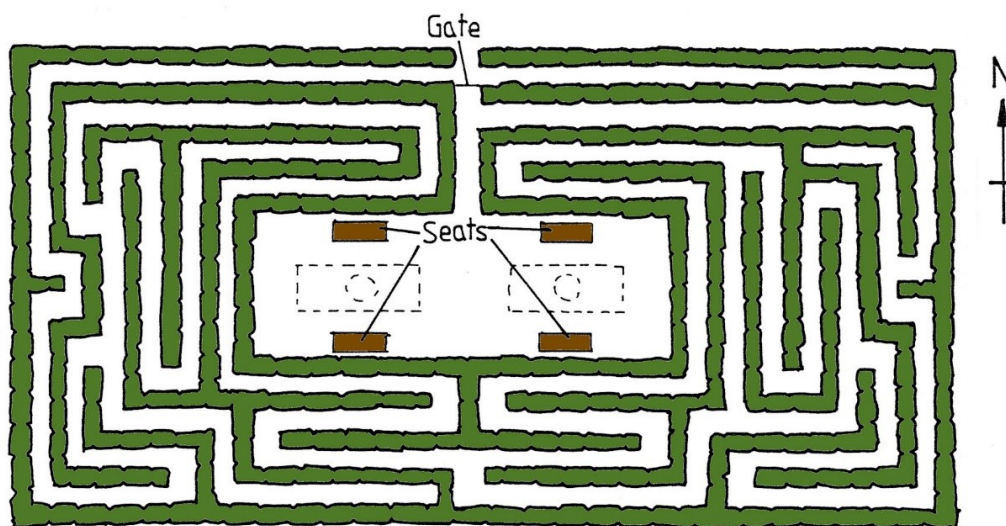
A Holly Maze Restored

Martin Locock



Originally published in Caerdroia 23 (1990), p.19-20

Castle Bromwich lies on the eastern edge of Birmingham, but despite the surrounding industry and housing estates, Castle Bromwich Hall and its gardens have survived. In 1985 a Trust was set up to carry out the restoration of this important example of an 18th century formal walled garden. Unusually, the garden restoration project included a large archaeological element, carrying out excavations in order to recover details of the original layout. From 1985 to 1989 most of the work was carried out by an MSC Community Programme project. One of the first areas to be investigated was the Lower Terrace, and a holly maze lay in this part of the garden. Unfortunately, fifty years without pruning had allowed the holly bushes to grow up to 30 feet tall, and as a result the plan of the maze was hard to decipher. Therefore, it was decided to remove all of the mature holly trees, and to replant. Once the trees had been grubbed out, excavation took place to discover the precise plan. This operation was fairly straightforward, since the gravel paths and soil beds for the hedges were easily recognisable, and so the plan could be reconstructed with confidence. The maze is formed of gravel paths and holly hedges, in a plan which is a rectangular mirror-image of London and Wise's Hampton Court design, although much smaller (23 x 7 metres). The central area originally contained two oval flower beds, and access to the escape path was restricted by an iron gate. The plan below is the restoration plan based on the excavated evidence – only the seats are additions.



A possible reason for the insertion of the maze in the garden is the asymmetry of the garden's shape, which means that in order to preserve the illusion of rectilinearity it was necessary to fill in some garden areas with extra features. The maze fills one of these additional units. Evidence for the date of the maze is provided by its appearance on maps. It is shown on the 1886 1st Edition 25-inch OS map for the area. However, it does not appear on an 1802 Estate map or on an 1846 tithe map, implying that it was a creation of the mid-19th century. The holly plants were mature by 1900, but had not begun to die off in 1980; an original planting c.1870 would fit these facts. In an article about the house and garden in the *Pall Mall Magazine*, Vol. XV (1898), p.291-304, statements from Lady Ida Bridgeman, who lived in the house from 1870, suggest that she was responsible for adding the maze to the garden, because she felt the garden was incomplete without one.

Although the maze is not of an original design or early date, it is one of the few mazes in the Midlands to be open to the public, as part of Castle Bromwich Hall Gardens – visit www.castlebromwichhallgardens.org.uk for details.

Martin Locock, Castle Bromwich, England; February 1990

The text and illustrations in this reprint are © Labyrinthos/Martin Locock 2017 as appropriate. Personal copies are permitted, but permission must be sought for any commercial reproduction - www.labyrinthos.net