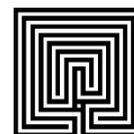


Looking at London's Labyrinths

Kimberly Saward



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Labyrinths in Britain is an informal group of labyrinth enthusiasts based in the United Kingdom. Connected by a love of the labyrinth, our unwritten goal is to weave a community of labyrinth enthusiasts by providing information about British labyrinths and the events being planned on and around them. We also work together to plan small gatherings on an occasional basis. Every time we get together, which happens infrequently, we come away bubbling with enthusiasm, eager to create ever easier paths towards community and connection. While there are labyrinths and mazes of varying ages all around the country, with more appearing all the time, we decided to showcase those within the confines of London in a day-long walking tour at the end of July 2019.

Thirty of us gathered at Friends House on Euston Road in central London to visit their beautiful library and view a rare broadsheet with an extremely complicated labyrinthine design dating from the late 17th or early 18th century. The labyrinth, which features paths filled with text, is split into two halves and used as endpapers in a book of minutes of the monthly meetings of Quakers in Harlingen in the Netherlands between 1677 and 1701. Jeff Saward and librarian David Irwin spoke about its discovery and possible origins before we lined up to look at the lovely old book.

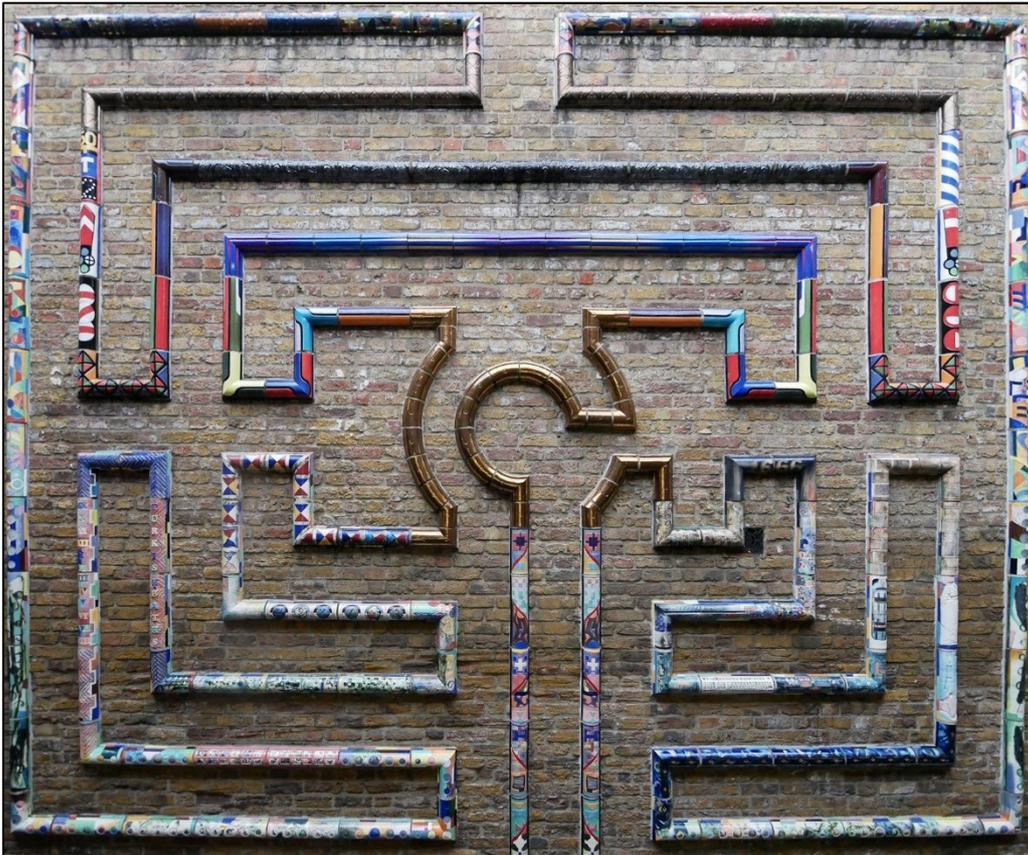


The labyrinthine broadsheet pasted as the endpapers of a Quaker book of minutes.

Photo: Jeff Saward, courtesy of the Friends House, London

Dividing into small groups, we then set out onto the streets of London for our walking tour. Tour leader Jan Sellers did a stellar job of planning the route, giving group leaders added information about the sites we'd be passing along the way so that the day was as much about London as it was the city's labyrinths. Even the Londoners amongst us found things they'd never noticed before!

Just a short way from King's Cross, just off the Euston Road, is a delightful warren of streets referred to as the Regent Quarter. In Varnishers Yard there is a mural depicting an Ariadne's Thread constructed of handcrafted tiles, each of which contributes to the telling of the story of life in the area.



The labyrinth in Varnishers Yard, London. Created by artist Phillip O'Reilly and installed in 2005. Photo: Jeff Seward

Travelling by tube and on foot, we then made our way to St. Olave's Church where the garden was opened for us so that we could spend time with the peaceful little labyrinth set into a healing garden outside the church that was once frequented by diarist Samuel Pepys in the 17th century.

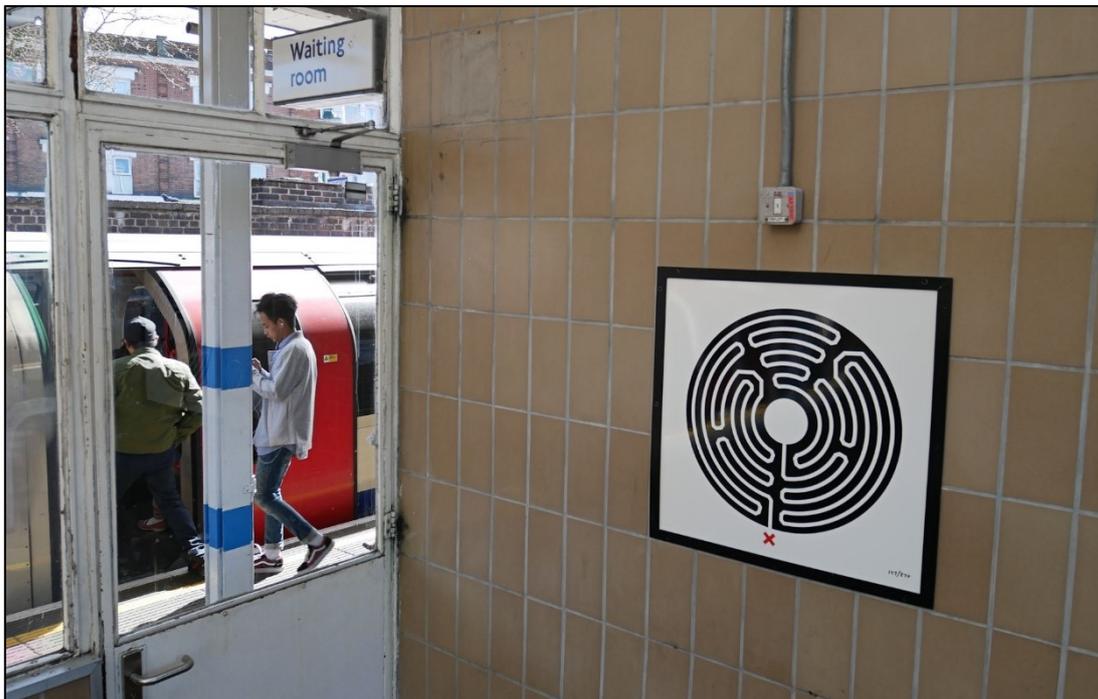


The labyrinth in St. Olave's churchyard, London. Photo: Jeff Seward

After a lunch break in nearby Seething Lane Gardens, we took the tube to visit the Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park for refreshments, before Park Manager Ken Greenway gave a short talk before guiding us through the cemetery and out to a classical 7-circuit labyrinth formed of crushed chalk and wildflowers, where we enjoyed a group walk – by now we were feeling like friends and were happy to walk the paths together in such a peaceful setting before heading back to the busier environment of Stratford.



The Labyrinth at Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park, London. Photo: Jeff Seward



One of Mark Wallinger's labyrinth plaques at Leytonstone Underground Station, London. Photo: Jeff Seward

At Stratford station we paused to hear about Mark Wallinger's *Art on the Underground* project with its 270 labyrinth plaques, one located in each of the London Underground stations. From there we walked onwards to Victory Park, home of a contemporary mirror labyrinth by Danish artist Jeppe Hein. Reflecting the trees and building of its surroundings, the playful installation gave us the chance to see both the path and each other with a new perspective.

As we gathered in our closing circle, the rain that had been threatening arrived and the heavens opened, hastening our goodbyes but not dampening our spirits – this was London, after all! Over the course of the day, we visited seven labyrinths and passed by several others in the form of logos and plaques. Not all were walkable, but we walked those we could.

Plans are already underway for a slightly expanded 2020 Labyrinths in Britain event. On a yet to be determined early summer weekend, we will hold a new variation of the London Walking Tour on Saturday then convene in Saffron Walden the following morning for a half day of presentations followed by an afternoon walking tour to visit the town's two labyrinths and two mazes along with a few extra treats of a more temporary nature. More information will be available on the Labyrinths in Britain website – www.labyrinthsinbritain.uk – and in our Facebook group in due course.

For anyone wishing to visit London's labyrinths, a PDF of public labyrinths and mazes created as a handout for participants at the London event is available for download on the website, and subsequently we considered creating an online map of those locations, but couldn't resist a bigger challenge, so there is now an interactive map of over 300 labyrinths and mazes throughout the UK on the Labyrinths in Britain website. It is hoped that the map will help both locals and visitors plan their journeys to include the labyrinthine paths that dot our countryside.

Special thanks go to Jan Sellers for her excellent leadership and planning for the London event, and to Sue McCarthy for her brilliant advice on the fine art of leading a walking tour and for creating the maps which guided us through London. To learn more about the manuscript labyrinth at Friends House, see "A Doolhof in London" by Jeff Saward, *Caerdroia* 48, p.50-54. TLS members can access this on the publications page in the members section of the TLS website.

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Finding each other in the Stratford Mirror Labyrinth. Photo: Kimberly Saward

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