

# Factsheet

## The Maze at Hampton Court Palace

- Perhaps the most famous maze in the world, the Hampton Court Palace Maze was planted in hornbeam in 1690 for William of Orange, probably by royal gardeners London and Wise.
- The maze was planted as part of a formal garden layout known as the 'Wilderness' (see below). There were at least two mazes originally planted in the Wilderness garden of which the current maze is the only survivor. It is the first hedge planted maze in Great Britain and now the only part remaining of the original 'Wilderness' area.
- Hedge mazes flourished in Britain up to the eighteenth century, until Lancelot 'Capability' Brown introduced natural landscaping and, in order to achieve his sweeping views, destroyed many formal garden features. Ironically, as Royal Gardener for twenty years, he lived next door to the Maze at Hampton Court, but was expressly ordered not to interfere with it!
- The current maze hedge was established in the 1960s when the existing hedges (a mix of hornbeam, yew, holly and privet) were replanted with fast growing yew. In 2005 hornbeam was reintroduced to the centre of the maze for the first time in 40 years. The Gardens and Estate team will regularly assess how well the hornbeam stands up to modern day wear and tear by visitors giving us the opportunity to consider reintroducing hornbeam on a wider basis to the maze in the future.
- The yew hedges are approximately 7' high and 3' wide.
- It is the most visited attraction in the gardens with around 350,000 people going in and out of the maze every year.
- The maze is trapezoidal in shape, covers an area of one third of an acre and consists of half a mile of paths. It takes an average 20 minutes to reach the centre.
- One of Jerome K Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat* declared of the maze "*it's absurd to call it a maze, only to become completely lost.*"

- In 2005 internationally renowned sound artists Greyworld were commissioned to create a permanent art installation for Hampton Court's maze. They created an artwork entitled *Trace*, which drew on the idea of the palace's historic maze as a place of furtive conversation and flirtation. This gentle soundwork was designed to affect the visitors' experience of their journey through the labyrinth, enticing them along the green corridors, tempted by tantalising sounds – a fragment of music, a snatch of laughter, the seductive rustle of fine silks and the whispers of an illicit conversation – that disappear around the winding paths. Visitors who manage to find the centre of the maze can sit and relax on touch-sensitive benches that emit subtle sounds, enabling ambient contemplation of their journey into the maze as well as an opportunity to devise a strategy out of it! With over a thousand self-generating sounds incorporated into the maze, visitors never experience the work in the same way twice.
- Sir Roy Strong, a member of the Maze Project Steering Group, said of the commission "Mazes have been part of the English garden since time immemorial. They mirrored the twists and turns of human life in a format that is at once both profound and playful. Greyworld's 'speaking maze' is a contemporary expression of a long garden tradition which embraced the centrality of sound as part of the garden experience. Sound could be both natural, like a delight in birdsong, or artificial, achieved by various mechanical devices. The Greyworld maze scheme fits neatly in as a descendant of the latter".

### **The Wilderness**

- The term 'wilderness' refers to a place to wander, rather than an uncultivated area of garden as the name suggests.
- William III would have walked through the wilderness at Hampton Court Palace with his devoted wife Mary II. The area would have comprised 18ft high hornbeam hedges, with interstices planted with elm.
- The Wilderness was the English version of a French 'bosquet'. The high hedges, secluded benches and winding paths made it a place where members of the royal Court could go for privacy and where gentlemen in particular could entertain ladies in private.
- Today, there are over 1 million bulbs planted in the Wilderness alone. In the

Spring the whole garden is carpeted as far as the eye can see with daffodils, interspersed with crocuses.