

Lessons in Labyrinths By Grahame Gardner

As many of you know, I have been involved in the birthing of a new permanent outdoor labyrinth for Edinburgh University Chaplaincy Centre. The Chaplain, Di Williams, is a trained Veriditas facilitator, and the Chaplaincy at present owns a canvas Veriditas Chartres variant labyrinth that they lay out every Monday during term-time. But for some years now, Di has dreamt of having a permanent Medieval-style labyrinth constructed in the University grounds, and this year she was finally granted funding to install one in George Square Gardens in the heart of the University.

I was called in to dowse the site for the labyrinth, and then recalled to dowse a second site, as the first one wasn't level enough. Construction was due to start in May but unfortunately was delayed until August, just as Chaplain Di left on an extended sojourn to Australia and New Zealand, where she was due to give some labyrinth talks and visit a few labyrinths out there. I did think that it was perhaps a trifle ominous that she wasn't going to be there during the construction, and this would prove to be an accurate hunch!

The second site, in the opposite quadrant of the Gardens, was not as nice a site energetically, and has a water vein that is geopathically stressed running under it, but I figured that I could come back when construction was finished to sort this out. I did find a blind spring nearby that will hopefully move over into the labyrinth, and a suitable centre was eventually dowsed on a nice energy ley running roughly westwards from Arthur's Seat. I think that this ley is actually a cross-country one recorded by Harry Bell in a little booklet called 'Forgotten Footsteps'; it runs westwards to a hill called Duncolm in the Dumbarton Hills northwest of Glasgow.

In the southwest corner of the Gardens, a gap between buildings afforded a view of the distant Pentland Hills. This would only be visible in winter when the trees were bare, and I calculated that the winter solstice sunset would just be visible setting into the hills where the building line intersected the skyline. So this, an azimuth of 197°, was chosen as the alignment of the labyrinth. When you entered the goal, you would be facing this direction. This also made for a nice entrance angle from the perimeter pathway round the Gardens.

In June, I met with the architect and Di to 'pin' the centre and lay out the alignment. We held a brief ceremony formulating intent for the labyrinth before I pinned the centre with a wooden stake. I then applied some earth acupuncture using flower essences to prepare the site for the construction work to come. A subsequent blessing was performed by Tashi Lhunpo monks prior to the cutting of the turf.

It was August before I managed to get back through to have a look, and discovered that things were not as advanced as I had hoped. It looked as though construction had only just started! I approached what appeared to be the foreman of the three-man team and introduced myself. To my surprise and delight, he turned out to be none other than Jim Buchanan, the well-

known labyrinth builder from Dumfries (www.landartist.co.uk). This is someone I've wanted to meet for a long time, and we had a great chat about the project and the Chartres pattern in general.

Jim explained that the delay was due to some constructional changes. The original plan had been to build the labyrinth out of two colours of gravel-impregnated resin mix, the two colours (for paths and wall) being separated by a thin brass fillet. However, this proved too expensive not to mention fiddly, and the current plan was to construct the walls using square granite setts, and then fill the paths with the gravel/resin compound.

There had been another construction delay when the quarry supplying the stone had been unable to meet the order, resulting in the stone having to be brought over from Portugal! So Jim had only started laying out the labyrinth in the last couple of days.

The next problem arose when I noticed that the alignment of the labyrinth seemed to be 'off' considerably from the winter solstice alignment that I had specified. On checking with the compass, I found that the alignment was due south! What on earth had gone wrong?

It transpired that the original alignment stakes had been removed by vandals since they were originally placed, and the architect had been called down to re-mark the alignment. For whatever reason, he only marked the N-S axis, not the winter solstice azimuth. At least, that's what the two workers told me!

Now I really wasn't sure what to do about this. Jim wasn't very keen on moving everything as they had spent some considerable time marking out all the turns and labryses, and I didn't feel that it was my place to insist that they moved everything. All I could do was ask some dowsing questions to see if this was going to be all right. My responses indicated that it was not going to be as energetically active as it would have been with the winter solstice alignment, but that a north-south alignment is a good 'default' for a labyrinth to have anyway, and that it would be just fine as it was. So I left them to carry on, putting this down to that moment of confusion that always seems to arise when constructing a labyrinth.

I haven't been back through to check on progress so far, but will have by the time this goes to press. Expect a full update in the next issue!