

Maze of Loppem

This authentic maze is certainly the most famous and most curious part of the castle park of Loppem among the general public.

According to the family history, the maze was designed between 1873 and 1875 by the young Albert and Ernest van Caloen, with the help of their home tutor, Abbé Henri Vandermeersch, who came from Kemmel. Albert and Ernest were the youngest children of Charles van Caloen and Savina de Gourcy Serainchamps, the builders of the castle of Loppem.

picture Albert van Caloen (+- 25 years old, but was about 17 when he designed the maze)

picture Ernest van Caloen (+- 10 years old, but was about 14 when he helped his brother with the maze design)

The inspiration for this maze certainly came from the birthplace of Abbé Vandermeersch. About 100m from his parental home was a beautiful maze on the castle estate of the former Lord of Kemmel. That maze may have dated back as far as the 18th century but was destroyed during World War I (in May 1918). Thanks to old postcards we know what it looked like around 1900.

photo labyrinth Kemmel (postcard)

Labyrinths and mazes go back to ancient traditions and are full of symbolism. The best known is the Greek myth of the labyrinth of Knossos with the imprisoned Minotaur. Since ancient times they have symbolized life itself, which constantly confronts us with false trails, dead ends, obstacles, crossroads and dilemmas. Many get lost, but in a maze the situation is not hopeless.

One can only guess the intention behind the Loppem maze: a symbolic pilgrimage to a central place of reflection? Are the many turns and dead ends a reflection of our life's path full of doubts and errors? Or is it just a carefree, adventurous child's game?

This 'wandering garden' forms a rectangle of 65 by 25 meters of no less than 2000 m².

One and a half kilometers of green and red hornbeam hedges form dozens of corridors in which the right way is quickly lost. The dead ends test our patience and the quest is still challenging but even more rewarding when reaching the central tree!

The maze, as one of the few garden mazes in Belgium, is just as renowned as the castle in terms of name recognition and number of visitors. It was this fame which enabled the maze to evolve from a beautiful park ornament, initially intended to entertain family and guests, into a top tourist attraction for young and old.

photo Westtoer



Visit www.zedelgem.be/doolhof for opening hours and prices.
There is also detailed information at the iron entrance gate of the maze.

For more information about the history and the latest news, read the blog on
www.kasteelvanloppem.be/nl/nieuws

Photos: Archive Castle of Loppem, municipal archive, collection family Van Ryckeghem, Westtoer