

## Julian's Bower

Another common name for turf labyrinths is *Julian's Bower*, sometimes appearing in corrupted forms such as *Gillian's Bore*, *Geylan Bower*, *St Julian's*, *Julaber's Barrow*, and even *July Park* (see Appendix II). Fisher and Gerster<sup>15</sup> note also *Den Julianske Borg* in Orsta, Norway.

No entirely convincing explanation has been offered, although W.R. Lethaby<sup>16</sup> noted: 'In the reign of Commodus [Emperor of Rome from 180 to 192], Q. Julius Miletus built a labyrinth as an institution for the amusement of the people'. Most commentators take a view similar to that of Bendixon and Lattey,<sup>17</sup> who say that the name Julian's Bower 'suggests an association with Julius, the son of Aeneas, who was present at the siege of Troy'. The eighteenth-century antiquarian William Stukeley seems to be ultimately responsible for this fanciful theory. He noted in his *Itinerarium* that many places called Julian's Bower were located near Roman sites, where (he supposed) complex cavalry manoeuvres, introduced by Julius Caesar, resembled mazes; but he also offered an alternative explanation, noting that Virgil's *Aeneid* tells how after the fall of Troy Aeneas founded a Trojan settlement at Latium, where his son Iulus led a riding display by cavalrymen in training, known as the *Ludus Trojiae*. Thus Stukeley tied together the names Troy Town and Julian's Bower in one neat theory. John Wall comments dryly that Stukeley 'uncritically accepted legend as history' – but Stukeley is by no means the only writer on labyrinths to do so.

An equally likely explanation, perhaps, derives from the semi-legendary life of Saint Julian, who was immensely popular in the Middle Ages as the patron saint of travellers, innkeepers, and pilgrims. His life story is told in a medieval French poem, *La Vie de Saint Julien*, found in ARSENAL MS 3516, folio 84, dated 1286, and available in an English translation on the Internet.<sup>18</sup> This epic tells the convoluted story of the twists and turns of Fate that led the pious Julian to build a shelter (a bower?) for benighted travellers. Is it possible that the medieval Church employed popular labyrinths to enact the story of this exemplar of selfless obedience? It would be interesting to look for correlations between the recorded sites of lost labyrinths and field names such as 'The Bowery'.

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<sup>15</sup> As footnote 1, page 70.

<sup>16</sup> Lethaby, W.R., *Architecture. Mysticism and Myth*, 1892. Full text at [www.sacred-texts.com/earth/amm/amm10.htm](http://www.sacred-texts.com/earth/amm/amm10.htm)

<sup>17</sup> Bendixon, E.E. and R.T. Lattey, *Top. Oxon.*, No. 2, Spring 1959\*.

<sup>18</sup> [www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/julian.html](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/julian.html)