

WARDENS BASE	Information, displays, toilets, disabled access & baby changing facilities
RESTAURANT	Gardener's Rest - training restaurant with the Stourbridge College Horticultural Unit. Open Mon - Fri 10.00 am - 3.00 pm for tea and snacks and (subject to availability) meals at midday.
LEASOWES MINIATURE RAILWAY	7 1/4" gauge steam and diesel trains. Sunday afternoons 2.00 - 6.30 pm (weather permitting). Rides go from the car park to Priory Pool and return. For further information contact Martin Male, 01562 710614.

## POINTS OF INTEREST

### 1. View of Halesowen church

Dedicated to St John the Baptist, this Norman church with later spire is built on the site used for worship during Saxon times. Shenstone much admired the church and white cottages surrounding it and created a number of views to them from within the Leasowes. His body is buried in the churchyard and there is a memorial urn in the church.

### 2. View of the clubhouse

The existing house was built in 1776-78 by Edward Home on the site of Shenstone's original farm house and it is currently the club house for Halesowen Golf Club. The club's 18-hole course is laid out on what were formerly the grazing grounds of the Leasowes. Still visible in places beneath the pasture is the medieval ridge and furrow structure.

### 3. Heywood Embankment

The embankment was built in 1797 to carry the canal. This section of canal, now isolated, is managed by a voluntary group, the Lapal Canal Trust.

### 4. Devil's Chair

The 'Devil's Chair' is the local name given to a large hollow in the hillside. It may have been the 'borrow pit' from which materials used in the construction of the canal embankment were excavated.

### 5. Priory Pool

Known locally as 'Breaches Pool' or 'Lady Pool', this is the natural collecting point for the streams which flow through the Leasowes. Priory Pool was enhanced by Shenstone to create the visual

illusion that it was connected to the many fish ponds around Halesowen Abbey and beyond. The canal embankment cut through the Priory Pool and completely blocked these views. Some of the earth works and dams that made up these fish ponds are still visible on the Illey and Lapal walk.

### 6. Site of ruined priory

The 'ruined' priory was built by Shenstone to resemble a ruin but also to serve as a modest dwelling for his gardener. He is rumoured to have built it with stone from Halesowen Abbey. It was described by Richard Graves (Shenstone's biographer) as 'a beautiful object in his prospect. It is intended to reinstate the Priory ruin as part of the Restoration programme funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund & Dudley MBC.

### 7. Virgil's Grove

This is the most famous element of the 18th century park. In Shenstone's day it was a grassy vale in a wooded valley where a stream wound through to a pool surrounded by yew trees. In the vale stood an obelisk dedicated to Virgil, the Roman poet. This area epitomised Shenstone's philosophy of picturesque gardening and was highly spoken of. Many prominent people of the time visited it - including the Lytteltons of Hagley, William Pitt and James Thomson. Shenstone intended Virgil's Grove to be a gloomy, melancholic place and even today a walk through this area is referred to by the locals as 'the dark half-hour'!

### 8. Cascade

The Serpentine stream with pools which flows into Virgil's Grove flowed over a magnificent cascade and stone grotto.

### 9. Chalybeate Spring

This natural spring, running over iron-rich rocks, emerges with a striking orange colour and is similar to Shenstone's original 'Chalybeate' spring - a notable feature on his circuit walk. Shenstone placed an iron bowl by the spring to encourage visitors to drink from it. His own melancholy and ill health is rumoured to have resulted from over-imbibing these waters. In fact he died of consumption and chemical analysis has shown the water to be harmless.

### 10. Lovers Walk

Beyond Beech Water and the site of the 'Assigination Seat' is the 'Lovers Walk'. This led to a grassy glade containing an urn dedicated to Maria Dolman, Shenstone's much-loved cousin, who tragically died of smallpox at the age of twenty one. The urn was inscribed: 'Sacred to the memory of a most amiable kinswoman. Ah! Maria! Most elegant of nymphs! Snatched from us in thy bloom of beauty.

Ah! Farewell! How much inferior is the living contemplation of others to the bare remembrance of thee!

### 11. Site of the Temple of Pan

Shenstone's original path climbed steeply into the High Wood and led, through a straight walk lined with holly, to the Temple of Pan. Only the holly walk remains today. From a seat located near the site of the Temple there are panoramic views of Frankley, Clent, Walton, Wychbury and the Clee Hills. From here a public right of way crosses the golf course to join Mucklow Hill. (Caution - look out for flying golf balls!)

### 12. Mucklow Hill

Formerly called Lawley Hill, this medieval route was originally not much more than a cart track connecting Birmingham and Hagley.

### 13. Green Lane

This is a short section of sunken lane which would have led from Pottery Farm to Coombs House and Mills (these were located on the west side of the canal where there is now an industrial estate). These double hedged sunken lanes, or hollow ways, may have been created by water erosion after many years of use by heavy carts and other traffic. They may be medieval in origin, forming part of a network that served the Manor of Hales. The diversity of hedgerow plants certainly suggests an ancient origin.

### 14. View of Coombeswood

Coombeswood is an area of open grassland, next to Dudley No.2 Canal, which contains remnants of ancient woodland. Having been the site of coal extraction, landfill and industrial development over the years, the area has undergone considerable changes.

### 15. Dudley No.2 Canal

This canal was commissioned in 1793 to link the Dudley No.1 Canal at Park Head with the Worcester and Birmingham Canal at Selly Oak. The Coombeswood Tube Works was established in 1860 by Abraham Barnsley. In its time it was the largest tube works in England and used the canal to ferry tubes to the rail branch adjacent to Hawne basin. This practice continued up until 1967. The original brick bridge which crossed the canal at the end of the Green Lane was demolished during the Second World War as an anti-invasion measure! The current steel bridge was constructed on the same site in 1993 by the Halesowen Abbey Trust.

### 16. Hawne Basin

Also called Halesowen or Coombeswood Basin, it opened in 1797 as a public wharf serving Halesowen. In 1902 the wharf

became a rail interchange. The basin marks the end of the navigable length of the canal, following the collapse of the Lapal Tunnel in 1917. Since 1980 the basin has been run by the Coombeswood Canal Trust as a marina.

### 17. Sylvan Green

Shenstone's leafy lane was originally the main entrance to the Leasowes and remains a pleasant walkway for most of its length.



This walk is part of a network of 14 walks throughout the many areas of meadow, wetland, farmland and woodland within the Borough of Dudley. All the walks put you in close contact with the attractive local countryside. The leaflets fully illustrate the route of each walk and give information about points of interest along the way. You can usually join the walks in several places and link with other public rights of way and canal towpaths.

The walk leaflets printed so far include:

*Blackbrook Valley; Pensnett Railway; The Stour Valley; Buckpool and Fens Pool; Illey and Lapal; Leasowes and Coombeswood; Bumble Hole; The Limestone Walk; Lutley Walk; Pedmore Walk.*

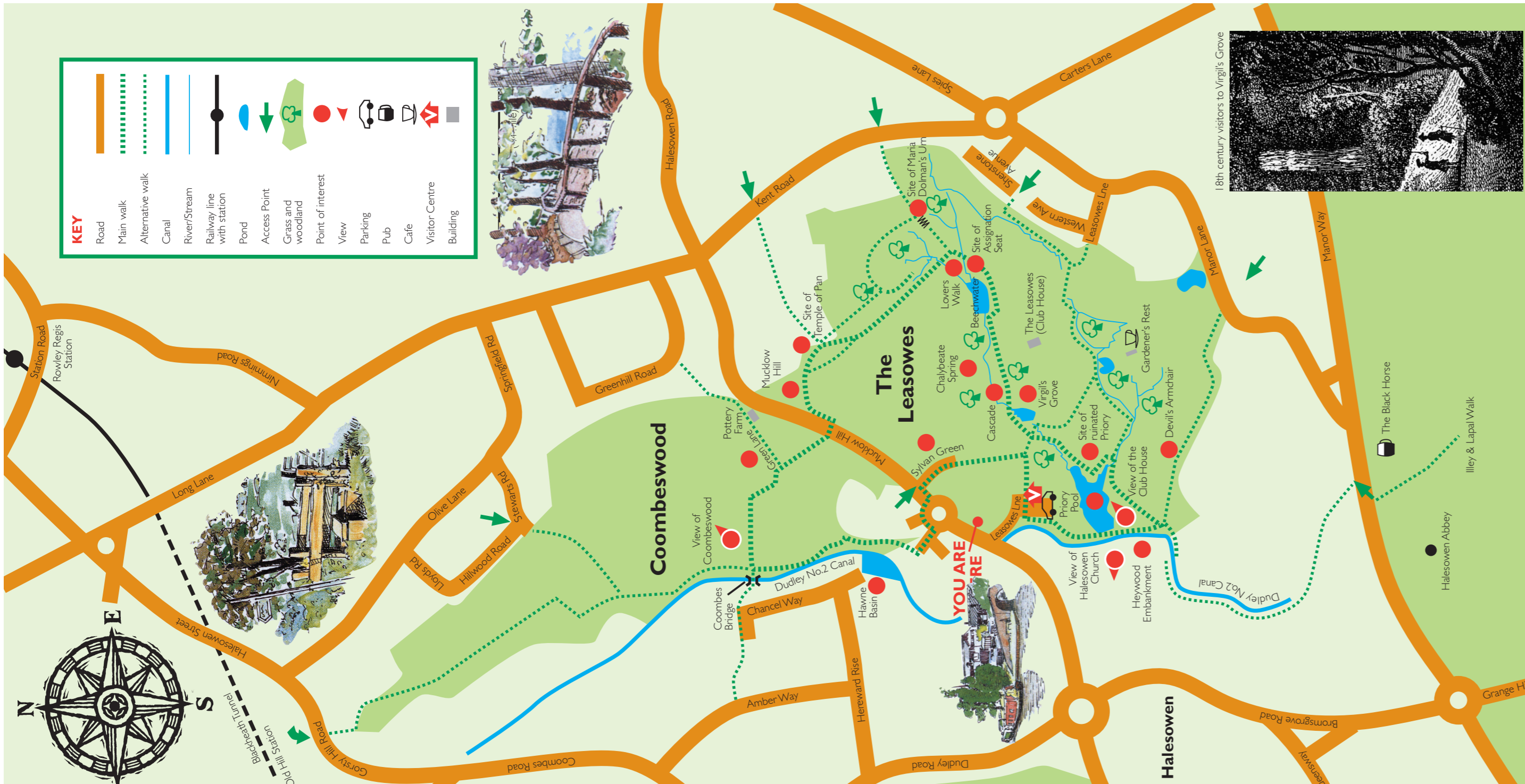
Some of the paths along The Leasowes and Coombeswood Walk are surfaced; many are grassed or bare. All may be muddy when wet. Gradients and cross-falls are typically shallow, but some short sections have steeper inclines or are stepped. There are gates or stiles at some entrances or where paths cross some boundaries.

For further information about these walks or any aspect of the countryside in Dudley, please telephone (01384) 814189.

Happy walking!



# Leasowes and Coombeswood

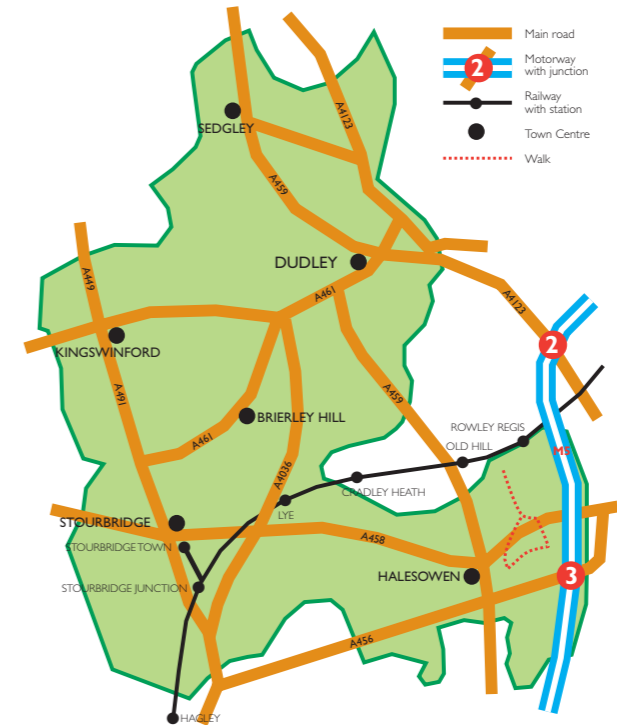


18th century visitors to Virgil's Grove

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## Leasowes and Coombeswood



'Landscape should contain variety enough to form a picture upon canvas: and this is no bad test, as I think the landscape painter is the gardener's best designer. The eye requires a sort of balance here; but not so as to encroach upon probable nature. A wood, or hill, may balance a house or obelisk; for exactness would be displeasing. . . ' - WILLIAM SHENSTONE, UNCONNECTED THOUGHTS ON GARDENING'.

This walk, east of Halesowen, takes you through the Leasowes and into the Coombeswood area of Dudley's green belt.

The Leasowes is a delightful area of historic landscape and ancient woodland designed in the 18th century by the poet William Shenstone. It is of international standing and, having been classed as Grade I on the English Heritage Register of

Parks & Gardens of Special Historic Interest, ranks in importance with such landscapes as Blenheim, Painshill, Stowe, and Rowsham.

William Shenstone was a well-known poet, letterwriter and 'man of taste' in his time. He inherited the Leasowes as a working farm from his father in 1742, but gradually Shenstone re-designed it as a 'rural poem'. Breaking free of the current fashion for formal landscaping, he made his name by following and enhancing nature. The Leasowes is considered to be one of the first natural landscape gardens in England and for a few years in the mid 18th century was one of the most visited gardens in the country.

Visitors took the famous 'circuit walk' around Shenstone's 'Arcadian' farm, past many urns and seats decoratively inscribed with tributes to his friends. Each one was placed to make the most of the immediate scene or the views beyond - perhaps to Halesowen church or to the ruined priory. But the most glorious aspects of the walk were the many rushing streams and cascades that Shenstone had harnessed to provide features in his landscape. Shenstone was most insistent upon a particular pronunciation of the name Leasowes and even spelt it 'Lezzoes' in some of his letters to emphasise this.

Following Shenstone's death in 1763, the Leasowes had many owners and it fell into disrepair. There is no 18th century plan showing the exact layout of the whole site. In 1989 Dudley MBC, in association with garden historians, undertook a detailed survey of the area and researched the archives in order to produce an accurate plan. It is now the Council's aim to embark on a long term restoration of this precious landscape.

The Leasowes and Coombeswood Walk does not follow all of Shenstone's circuit walk but it will give the visitor a flavour of the 18th century landscape. Whilst most of the more fragile elements of the landscape have gone, the underlying structure still remains.

LENGTH	4 km (2.5 miles)
TIME	2 hours
PARKING	Leasowes car park, off Mucklow Hill
BUSES	Centro Hotline for information: 0121-200 2700.
PUBS	There are none on the walk itself - the nearest is The Black Horse, Manor Way.
LOCAL GROUPS	Friends of the Leasowes and Leasowes Volunteers both c/o Leasowes Park Wardens' Base, Leasowes Lane, Mucklow Hill, Halesowen