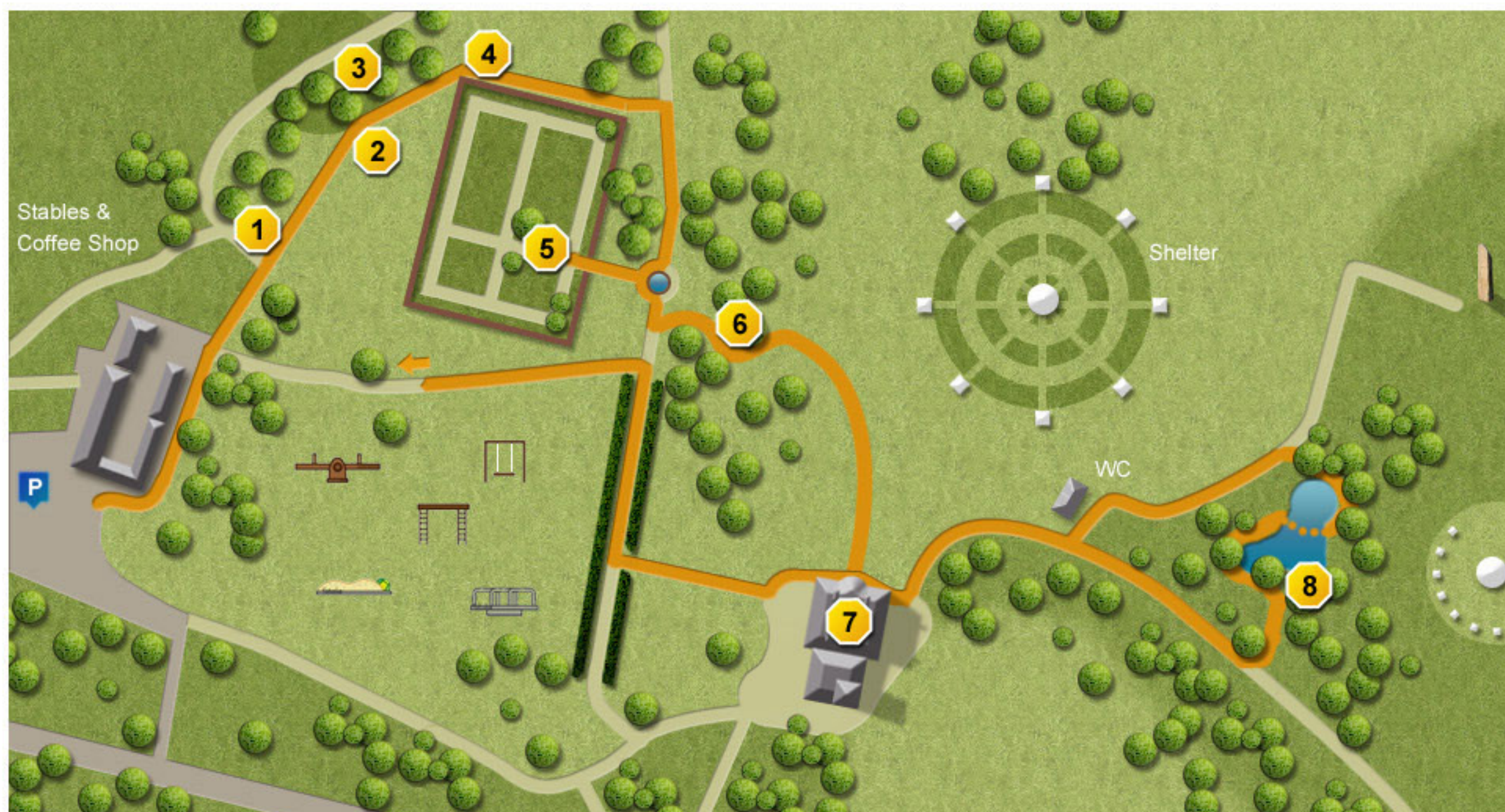


Lady Dixon Park Trail

Lady Dixon Park is a joy to discover, with its woodlands and meadows children can explore diverse habitats and the huge variety of wildlife that lives there. Among the park's main attractions are a walled garden, a Japanese style garden with water features, a children's play area, Wilmont House and a beautiful rose garden. This circular route is approx 1.5 Km.



Facilities

Toilet facilities are available on site. There are many areas where you can have a packed lunch including a covered pergola if it rains. There is also a café on site, as well as a play park.

Guided tours can be pre-booked by contacting Lagan Valley Regional Park.

Tel: 028 90491922

Email: admin@laganvalley.co.uk

Website: www.laganvalley.co.uk

Equipment needed for the trail

- Outdoor shoes & clothing
- Trail booklets
- Teachers guide
- clip boards / pens / crayons
- Clip boards / pens / crayons
- Measuring tapes
- Minibeast jars (optional)
- Tray for collecting minibeasts
- Camera (optional)



Beginning at the lower car park, take the path to the right of the stables building. This path passes behind the works yard. Continue straight until you come to a fork in the path. On your left you will have a tulip tree. This area is good for introducing some of the trees you'll find in Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park.



Stop 1 – Discovering Trees

This is a good area to introduce some of the trees that you will find in Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park.

The first tree you will encounter is the North American Tulip Tree so called because its beautiful flower looks a great deal like a tulip. This tree is not native to Ireland and the leaf has a distinctive four lobed shape. Unusual trees like this were grown as specimen trees in estate gardens.

Beside the tulip tree you will see a horse chestnut tree. These are well known because they produce the famous conker that children will recognise. The leaf comprises 5 – leaflets. You can compare the leaves to lots of hands waving from the tree. In the spring it has flowers that resemble large white candles. In the autumn you can look at the buds which are sticky to the touch.

Further down the path you'll find an oak tree. Oak is widespread throughout the Lagan Valley Regional Park, in fact, Belvoir Park Forest is home to the oldest oak tree in Ireland which dates back to 1642. Oaks are deciduous broadleaved trees which can support more species of wildlife than any other Irish tree. They have lobed leaves and rough bark. You can identify oaks in winter by their brown coloured buds.

Known as the 'King of the Trees', oaks are a symbol of strength. Acorns were often used for fattening pigs.

Evergreen trees at this stop are the holly and the Scots pine. This is a good spot to complete the 'meet a tree' activity.



Take the path that goes to the right you'll come across some birch trees that have their roots exposed above ground. There are also a few wooden sculptures.



Stop 2 – Roots

The birch trees at this stop have fantastic exposed roots which can be used to discuss root function.

Birch trees are medium sized, deciduous broadleaved trees commonly found in woodlands and parklands. The bark of a mature tree is silvery in appearance often with dark patches and its leaves are small, dark green, toothed and diamond shaped. Seeds are contained in cylindrical brown fruit clusters. Birch can be identified in winter by its silvery bark.

Widely associated with birth and young children. Birch twigs were often put beside cradles for protection. It is said witches used birch trees to make their brooms. The sap, bark, leaves, twigs and roots were used for food and medical treatments.



Just behind the birch trees there is a great area for the pupils to carry out a minibeast investigation.



Stop 3 – The Woodland Floor

This is a great place to talk about woodland ecosystems, insects, birds and mammals. You can get the kids to look for minibeasts and record what they have found in the table inside the trail booklet. You can start the texture game here.



Continue walking along the path. You'll come across three commemorative plaques for Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon's beloved dogs. Complete the associated fact finding activity.



Stop 4 – Dixon's Dogs



Continue along the path until you can turn right. Walk until you come across a fountain, take the path to the right of the fountain and enter the secret garden.



Stop 5 – The Walled or Secret Garden

The walled garden was originally built as a sheltered spot for growing flowers and fruit for the house but was also a tranquil spot for the family to walk. Today the gardens are used to display a wonderful assortment of plants. This is also a fantastic area for butterflies.

Discovering the Natural World Activity

Get the kids to find their own quiet spot. Ask them to sit and observe the natural world around them, making notes or drawing pictures to present what they've found. After about 5 or 10 minutes get the kids to form a circle and discuss their findings.



Exit the secret garden, at the fountain turn right. Before you get to a black gate you will see a rough trail into the woods, take this path. You will see many odd shaped trees.



Stop 6 – Squirrel Country

This is a great area to look at the shape of trees and to discuss evergreen trees and cones. You will find cypress, redwood and yew trees. This area is a good habitat for birds and squirrels. Look out for the giant pine cone sculpture.



Walk though the woodland. On the other side turn right and walk towards Wilmont House.



Stop 7 – Wilmont House

Wilmont House was designed as a double mansion to house James Bristow's family plus that of his son James Thomson Bristow (1827-1877). The house was designed by Thomas Jackson (1807-1890), one of Belfast's most important Victorian architects. Wilmont house is typical of Jackson's domestic designs, sensibly and comfortably planned, undemonstrative in an age when buildings were excessively ornate, and providing a composition entirely suiting the situation.

Features: False window which has been painted on the brickwork above the porch to balance the façade composition. James Bristow's initials inscribed on the side of the house.

In 1866 James Bristow died and the property went to his son J T Bristow.

In 1877 the property was taken over by trustees, William Laird of Birkenhead and Samuel Smith Bristow (brother) of Liverpool.

In 1879 the house was sold to R H Reade (related on mother's side to the Stewarts of Ballydrain).

In 1913 the property goes to son George Reade. In 1919 the house and land was sold to Sir Thomas (1868-1950 born in Groomsport) & Lady Edith Stewart Dixon (1872 - 1964). In 1959 Lady Edith Dixon gives property to Belfast Corporation (now Belfast City Council). In 1963 was used as a home for the elderly for a short while and is currently used on occasions.

Visitors to house: Duke of Windsor, who was a guest there when he was the Prince of Wales, Captain Scott, the famous Antarctic explorer, stayed there during a visit to Belfast in 1904. During the Second World War, American troops were billeted within the grounds.

Lady Edith Stewart Dixon

Died Jan 20th 1964 aged 92. She was created a Dame of the British Empire after the First World War in recognition of her work for the forces. Lady Dixon also worked tirelessly during the Second World War. As wife of His Majesty's Lieutenant for Belfast, Lady Dixon took a prominent part in official ceremonies and helped to entertain royalty. She was first Mayor of Larne and was the second woman to be made Freeman of the Borough. Her long life was marked by public and private benevolence, culminating with the generous gift of Wilmont estate, their Belfast home since 1919. Lady Dixon's will stated 'To use the said house and lands for the greatest good of the citizens of the city of Belfast'.



From Wilmont House follow the road down the hill, past the toilet block which will be on your left. Continue along the path until you find a secret set of stone steps taking you down into the Japanese gardens.



Stop 8 – The Japanese Gardens

Ask the pupils to think about what features in the garden make it Japanese. These could include the water features, stone bridges, lilies, Japanese maple trees, pagoda (stone Japanese houses), tranquillity and calmness.

The water feature is an excellent habitat for pond life. This pond is full of tadpoles, frogs, diving beetles, water boatmen, pond skaters, pond snails and ramshorn snails. Other birds and mammals may use the pond as a source of food and water.



Exit the Japanese gardens at the other end of the pond. Turn left at the top of the steps, this will lead you back to Wilmont House. Follow the path past Wilmont House, until you reach a pathway through a high hedge. Turn right and walk until the next left, taking the path through the camellia trials. Follow this path you can either turn into the play park from here or alternatively if you follow it to the end you will arrive back at the car park.