



Regaining Paradise: Sustainability in the Early Years

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Bedford Park

My parents separated 4 years ago and consequently my husband and I along with our baby son moved in with my mum to support her. This was a very difficult time for everyone, and I really struggled to make a home there. I took many walks with my son up and down Kenfig Hill, but the play parks, shops and small allotments wasn't enough green to make me smile. Then my wonderful mum invited us to join her daily trail – Bedford Park. Basically, my back garden! 4 years later, this is still as special to me now as it was the first time I ventured through, and this time I take a daughter as well as a son.

Bedford Park has so many little nooks, there is always something new to explore, but my favorite thing about it, is that wherever I walk, I am enveloped by green, welcoming trees and the sounds of nature. If I didn't feel peace at the start of the journey, I am certainly at peace by the end. I am thankful for the impact Bedford Park has had on my well-being over the recent years. Nature has seen me cry, laugh, forgive and embrace, and this is why I have chosen this location for the John Muir Award.

The contrasting view from the front to the back of my house in Kenfig Hill, Bridgend

Front:



I shut my door to the unwanted chaos, and just beyond my back garden is the nature trail, Bedford Park, that closes off the frustrating sounds, sights, and smells of pollution.



Back:

We are suddenly enveloped by green trees blowing in the soft summer breeze. We hear the river crashing against the rocks, see the creatures playing in the trees, and smell the fresh, warm air as it touches our faces.



Discovering History

Kenfig Hill & the beautiful Bedford Park

Apparently, Kenfig and the immediate location is immersed in history from prehistoric times to consuming strong Roman and Viking influences within the more modern historical timescale. The neighbouring areas of Kenfig grew from the incursion of sand that eventually submerged Kenfig. The ancient city of Kenfig's real history most likely starts around Normans time in the 12th century, with Kenfig Castle being built.



Kenfig is also known for the ironworks which is located at the center of the 40acre, Bedford Park, surrounded by nature and wildlife, and Celtic Trail cycle tracks. The ironworks has recently undergone a £20,000 refurbishment and is one of the best-preserved ironworks of the 18th century. It is one of the most complete significant ancient monuments in Britain. John Bedford, started it in 1770, and although the industry of iron, coal and copper provided many jobs including mining, and the creation of transport systems such as trainlines, turnpikes, tramlines and docks, it did mean damaging nature and destroying wildlife by turning hills and fields black and grey.



Bedford Park, Now...

This park has 45 acres of woodland and although it holds the remains of the 18th Century, Cefn Cribwr Ironworks at its heart, it is a site of significance for Nature Conservation. The land supports marsh, woodland, grassland and wetland habitats.

Some of the common species here include speckled wood butterfly and chiffchaff, furthermore, some rare species including dormice and pipistrelle bats which receive extra protection under wildlife legislation and are merely found in few locations across Bridgend.

This park has been granted Local Nature Reserve status, with plans established to prioritise certain parts for action and funding. These areas are to be managed as nature reserves and protected from unfitting uses or development.



Speckled Wood Butterfly



Dormice



Chiffchaff

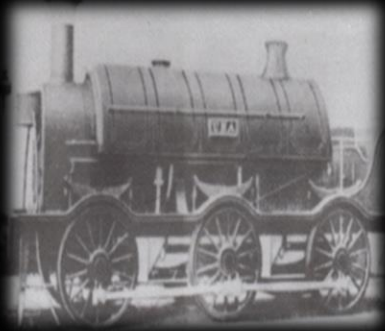
Discover



(Source: Centre Parks, UK, 2015)



Pipistrelle Bats



This train once ran along this pathway which became a railway line in 1862. I wonder how many animals died by their homes being invaded.



Peace & tranquillity
embraced by the trees
of Nature



Tilly found Strawberry
Plants like hers at home



Moses wondered, is that
really a Beehive in the tree?



Yes! And they were
very busy bees!



A little greenfly resting on a
leaf



A busy bee collecting
nectar and pollen from a
flower



A little snail climbing the
stem of the plant



A Caterpillar inside
his cocoon!

Our Map of Exploration



However, we were shocked to discover many trees had been chopped down and used to be made into a giant bench. A friendly dog walker told me that a group of children had an educational class there last week, which is great, but all I could see was the chopped trees.

Explore

Less than 1 month ago, this was a little nook on our nature walk which had become one of my favourite local places to sit and watch my children play – a small, green space embraced by trees and the sound of nature. I love it here!

It was sad to see the ground burnt by campfires and the branch of a tree destroyed, that once homed wildlife. It was devastating to see thoughtless litter dumped everywhere.



**“Mummy,
why didn’t
the people
put their
rubbish in
the bin?
Will the
birdy’s beak
get stuck?”**

Conserve

Throughout this project, I have learned that Bedford Park is priority to Bridgend to conserve, but I was so sad about the trees and the new bench, my children were sad about the litter all over the grass. Therefore, we decided to conserve ourselves to support what our country is trying to achieve...



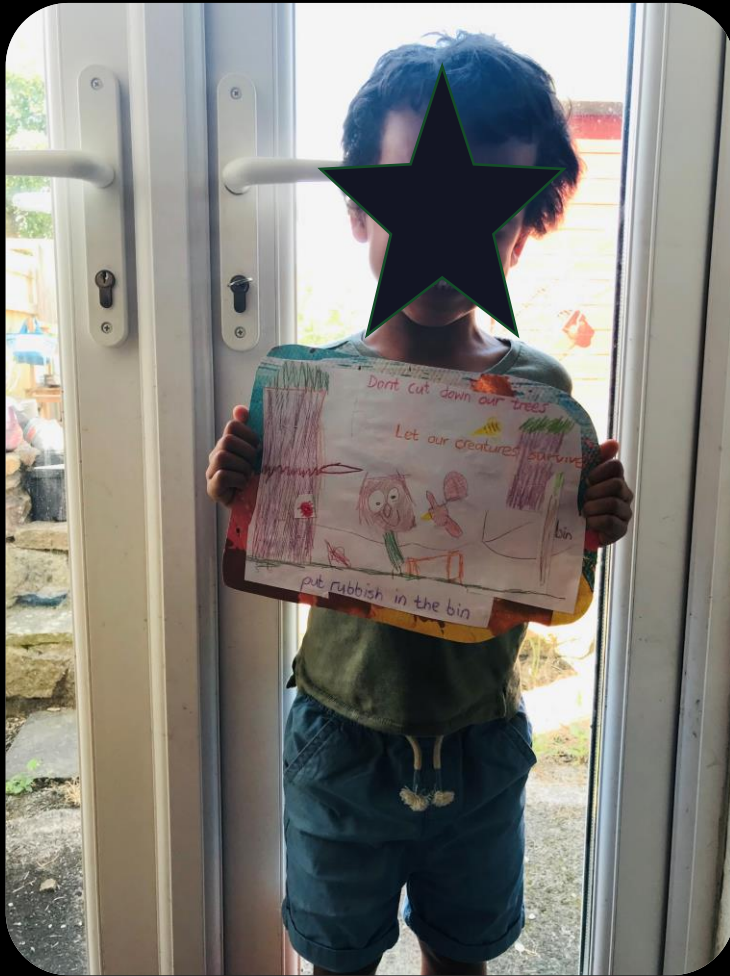
We recently planted 9 new trees



Early this year, I entered a competition with 9TREES, and unexpectedly, I won! This resulted in the planting of 9 new trees in Llandeilo. Furthermore, October 2022, my children lost their Grandmother to cancer, and we wanted to pay tribute by doing something special to remember her.

Throughout this project, we reflected on the reality that we cannot save the trees that are gone in Bedford Park, just as much as we cannot bring their Shosh (Grandmother), back to life. But we remembered the 9 trees we did plant. Therefore, as well as having a positive effect on climate change, and contributing to reforestation, we too are keeping my mother in-law's memory alive, in the 9 trees that have been planted.

We made posters



Moses and Tilly also drew wonderful pictures, and we shared them on social media, to remind everyone that our world is special, and we need to work together to keep it clean and tidy, so that all the plants and animals have a safe place to live in nature.



Keep Our World Clean

We went back to do some litter picking

As we reflected on the mess that we had seen on our favourite nature walk, we decided to do some litter picking together. We picked up all the rubbish that we could find and put it in the rubbish bin.



Top-quality real-life
action!

Share

Reflecting on this project, I have learned the importance of trees, not just the peace I feel after being enveloped by their embrace on a bad day, or the comforting feeling I get after experiencing another great walk amongst its leaves and branches. But how they home many living creatures, how they give oxygen so that we can breathe. At first, I was surprised how I felt seeing the trees cut down in Bedford Park; I was surprised that I was disappointed to see the wooden bench. But after taking part in this project, I understand why I felt that way. I care about the trees now, more than just for my own positive health and well-being, but for the world's life and for the generations to come.

Therefore, I have written a poem from the perspective of an Oak tree, and it is through this poem, I wish to advocate for our planet – Let's regain paradise and teach out little one's about sustainability. They are not too young to learn a bird needs a home, or caterpillar needs food, and they are not too little to understand that litter can harm our wildlife. Let's show them that nature is to be loved and respected, appreciated and valued.

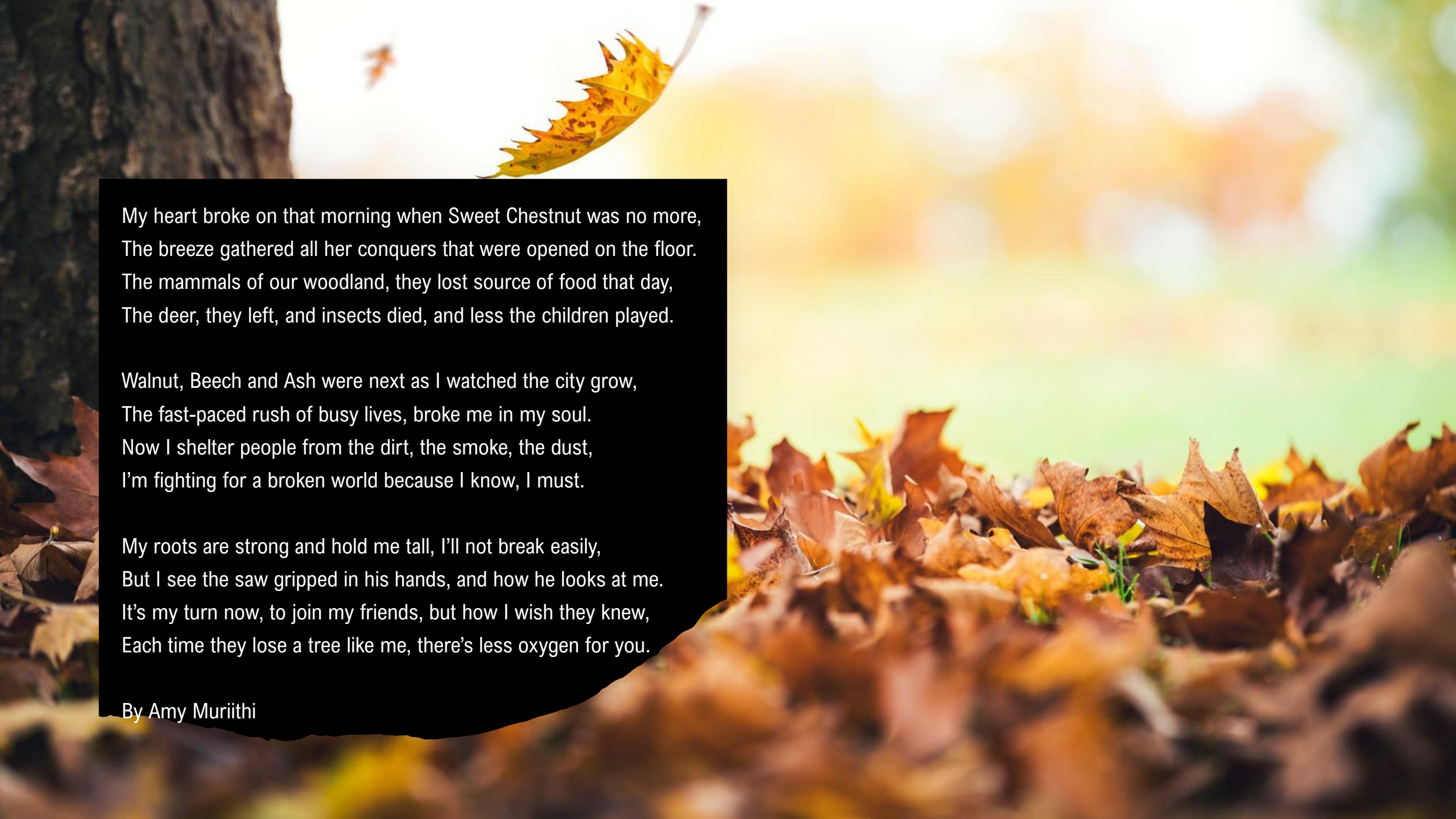


The Wise Oak Tree

I was once a little seed, and I grew into an Oak
And over time I've watched, as country turned to smoke,
Where once I nestled birds & bees, embraced with open branches
Listening to the Nature's song, Oh how I wish it lasted.

I grew so tall, I've seen it all, and it pains me all these years
When I lost my friend, Silver Birch and her Violets and Bluebells.
She gave the best conditions for the Mosses and the grass
And we'd smile together watching children laugh, as they climbed from branch to branch.

I remember in our old woodland, more friends, but Sycamore,
The ladybirds felt abandoned when his wood piled on the floor,
The Caterpillars felt hungry by the loss of his green leaves,
And no more flowers to share out pollen to the friendly little bees.



My heart broke on that morning when Sweet Chestnut was no more,
The breeze gathered all her conquers that were opened on the floor.
The mammals of our woodland, they lost source of food that day,
The deer, they left, and insects died, and less the children played.

Walnut, Beech and Ash were next as I watched the city grow,
The fast-paced rush of busy lives, broke me in my soul.
Now I shelter people from the dirt, the smoke, the dust,
I'm fighting for a broken world because I know, I must.

My roots are strong and hold me tall, I'll not break easily,
But I see the saw gripped in his hands, and how he looks at me.
It's my turn now, to join my friends, but how I wish they knew,
Each time they lose a tree like me, there's less oxygen for you.

By Amy Muriithi

The End

