



THEN

**SWEDENBORG
GARDENS**

**AND
NOW**



1688-2020

“Kindness is an inner desire that makes us want to do good things even if we do not get anything in return. It is the joy of our life to do them.”

(Emanuel Swedenborg)

SocietyLinks Tower Hamlets

SocietyLinks Tower Hamlets is a vibrant community charity that provides opportunities and activities to address the needs of underprivileged local residents through small, targeted projects. We aim to empower people to make significant lifestyle and social changes, and to achieve long-term improvements to their quality of life and that of their families. Our activities focus on education and training, unemployment, social exclusion and equality and diversity.

For more information, please visit www.societylinks.org.uk.

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Where is Swedenborg Gardens?

Swedenborg Gardens is in Whitechapel near Shadwell station.

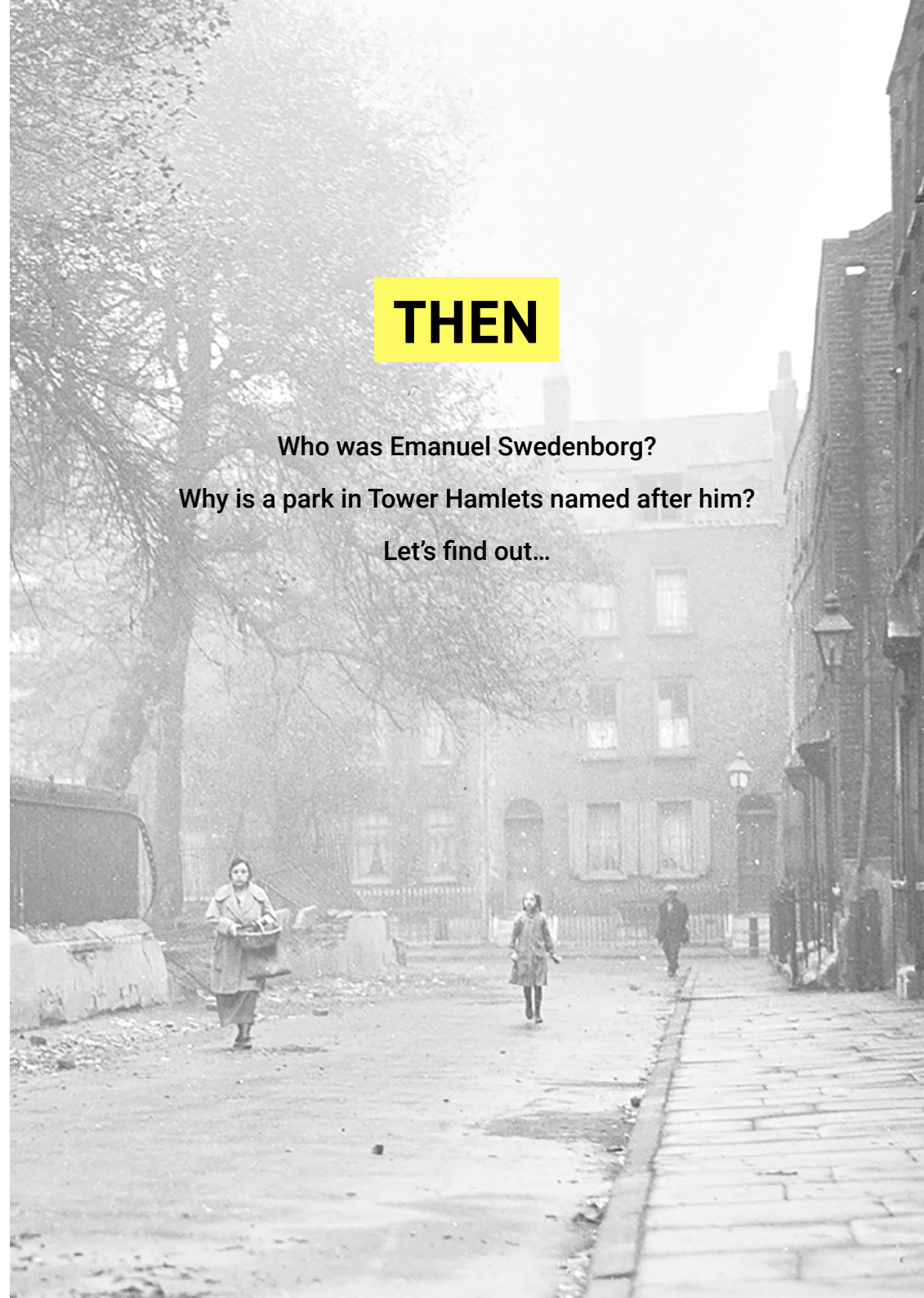


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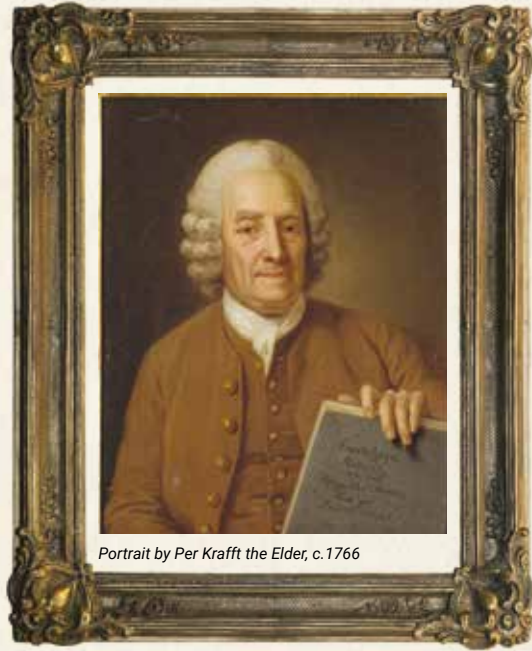
Who was Emanuel Swedenborg?

Why is a park in Tower Hamlets named after him?

Let's find out...



Who was Emanuel Swedenborg?



Portrait by Per Krafft the Elder, c.1766

Emanuel Swedenborg was a Swedish inventor, thinker, scientist and theologian (someone who studies religion) who lived from 1688 to 1772. He published many articles and books in his lifetime about science, theology (religion), philosophy and maths.

Swedenborg in London

Emanuel travelled a lot around western Europe and spent time in London living near Swedenborg Gardens, which was then known as 'Prince's Square'. When he was in London, he went to church every week at a Swedish Church in the square. He was in London when he died and his

body was buried in the churchyard there. That's why the area became known as 'Swedenborg Gardens'!

Early life

Emanuel was born in Stockholm in Sweden on 29 January 1688. His father was a bishop and a professor at a university. His mother came from a wealthy mining family. Emanuel studied science at Uppsala University where his father worked. He graduated (finished his studies) in 1709. He then travelled around western Europe for a few years, spending time in England (London), France and the Netherlands.

“Love comes into being through useful service to others.” (Emanuel Swedenborg)

Science and inventions

Emanuel was a keen scientist and published many books on science. He came up with some ground-breaking inventions, which included a submarine, an automatic weapon, a musical instrument and an aeroplane, which he called his “Machine to Fly in the Air”. He also made some amazing discoveries about the way our brains work and how specific parts of the brain control our movements and speech.

Dreams and spiritual thinking

Everything changed for Emanuel in the 1740s when he was in his 50s. He experienced strange dreams and visions and became more interested in spiritual ideas. He decided to stop his scientific work and focus instead on philosophy (the study of ideas) and theology (religion). He published a book describing his dreams, called *'The Journal of Dreams'*. His most well-known book is called *'Heaven and Hell'* and was published in 1758. In it he describes the 'afterlife' and what he believed happens after people die.

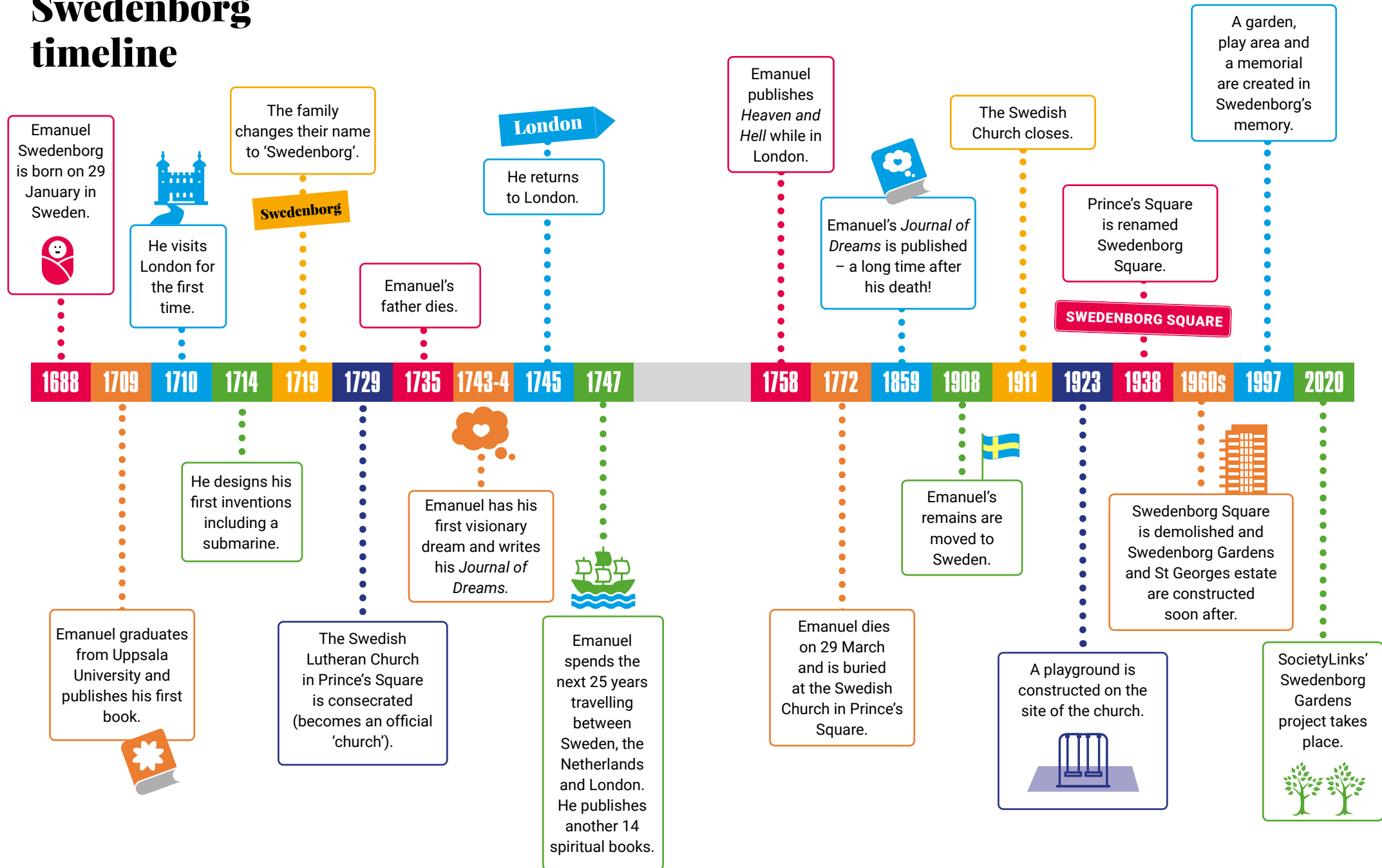
Emanuel Swedenborg died in 1772 in London at the age of 84.

DID YOU KNOW



- Swedenborg Gardens used to be a square with houses around the outside and a church in the middle.
- Emanuel's surname was originally Svedberg.
- Swedenborg's inventions included an early aircraft!
- His remains were excavated from the churchyard in Prince's Square and returned to Sweden in 1908.
- There's a society devoted to Emanuel Swedenborg called the Swedenborg Society. It was set up 50 years after he died.

Swedenborg timeline



History of Swedenborg Gardens

Swedenborg Gardens used to look very different. In Emanuel Swedenborg's time it was a square called Prince's Square. There were houses around the outside and a large church in the centre. The square was renamed Swedenborg Square in 1938 after Emmanuel Swedenborg.

Prince's Square was created in the 1720s by Swedish people who lived in London. The number of people from Sweden and Scandinavia living in London had been increasing since the Great Fire of London in 1666. They built a church for their community called the Swedish Lutheran Church in the centre of the square. The congregation of the church and residents of the square included wealthy timber merchants, embassy staff, shopkeepers and sailors.



Swedish Lutheran Church in Swedenborg Square (courtesy of Swedenborg Society archive)



Engraving of Swedish church by Benjamin Cole, c.1750 (courtesy of Swedenborg Society archive)



Removal of Swedenborg's remains from Swedish Church in 1908 (courtesy of Swedenborg Society archive)



Interior of Swedish Church (courtesy of Swedenborg Society archive)

Emanuel Swedenborg went to this church when he was visiting London and he was buried here when he died. In 1908 his remains were dug up and taken back to Sweden.

The church was abandoned in 1911 and quickly became derelict (run down). In 1923, the council bought the land, knocked the church down and created a children's playground on the site of the church.



The playground in the middle of Swedenborg Square, 1930 (City of London, London Metropolitan Archives)



Plaque inside Swedish Church (courtesy of Swedenborg Society archive)



Swedenborg Square, south side looking east, 1921 (City of London, London Metropolitan Archives)



Swedenborg Square, 1955 (City of London, London Metropolitan Archives)

In 1945, during World War 2, the area around the square was damaged during the Blitz (when Nazi planes bombed London). The buildings in the square were repaired after the war, but not long after, in the early 1960s, they were demolished. This was known as 'slum clearance', which involved removing old buildings that were in poor condition and replacing them with modern estates.

Swedenborg Gardens and St Georges Housing Estate were created on the site of the square and remain as such today.



St George's Estate, Swedenborg Square, 1972 (City of London, London Metropolitan Archives)



Swedenborg Square North Side, 1961 (City of London, London Metropolitan Archives)

NOW

What's Swedenborg Gardens like today?
Let's hear what the residents have to say...



Swedenborg Gardens today in pictures



(Photos by James Ford)

Swedenborg Gardens: residents' highlights

We asked local residents to tell us what they liked best about Swedenborg Gardens. Here's what they said:

Ahsan, 40s: **“I like the play area and just having a bit of greenery and open space. I use the park for relaxation and bringing the kids down for play and fun and some walking to keep fit.”**

Asma, 9 years: **“I like playing lots of different sports in the park. My favourite part is the playground – it's a space to chill out with friends.”**

All names have been anonymised.

Shazia, 13 years: **“My favourite part is the green space in the middle. It's a space where you can do any sport and have a picnic.”**

Uzma, 40s: **“My favourite thing about the park is the green space. During the pandemic, being out here was the only time we could socialise and let the kids run around. [...] It offers a lot with the playground and the green area. The way it's done is very nice. [You can] sit down and have a picnic and watch the kids play at the same time.”**

ACTIVITIES

Relax with some Swedenborg Gardens mindfulness?

Learn about the local history on a walking tour?

Or perhaps you'd rather enjoy exploring the nature in the gardens with your family?

There's an activity for everyone...



“The nature of heaven is to provide a place there for all who lead good lives, no matter what their religion may be.” (Emanuel Swedenborg)

Swedenborg Gardens mindfulness

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a technique that involves focusing on what's happening in the present moment – in your mind, body and surroundings. Being more mindful can help you feel calmer and process difficult thoughts or situations.

Mindful walking

Spending time in an outdoor, green space such as Swedenborg Gardens is good for your wellbeing. To be more mindful while walking, try these techniques:

1. Focus on your breathing while you walk. Notice as you inhale and exhale. Think about how you feel.
2. Listen to your thoughts, feelings and emotions. Let them come into your mind and notice them. Mindfulness doesn't mean blocking thoughts, rather it is about accepting your thoughts and feelings at that time.
3. Look around you – at the trees, plants, sky, buildings. Take the time to notice your surroundings. We are usually rushing around, so slowing down can help you feel calmer.

4. Being more mindful as you walk will take practice. It may feel strange and a bit forced when you start. The more you do it, the more natural it will feel.
5. You can try this with your children by asking them questions about how they are feeling and what they can see.
6. You don't have to go on a long walk to be mindful – a short, mindful walk is just as good if you are short of time.

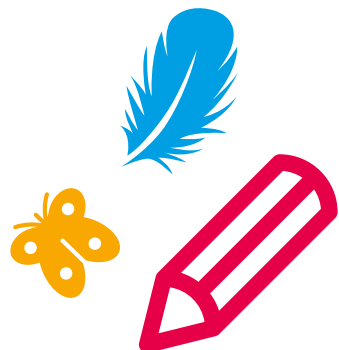
Mindful breathing for children

Try these breathing techniques with your children. It can help them feel calmer and boost their concentration. You can do these techniques too!

- Tell your children to let their belly expand as they breathe in and contract when they breathe out. Count to six as they (and you!) breathe in and then six as they breathe out. Repeat a few times before returning to normal breathing.
- Ask your child to lie down. Spend a few moments looking at the clouds. Place a soft toy on their belly. Encourage them to watch it go up and down as they breathe in and out.

Can you spot...?

This is a fun activity to do with your children when you are going for a walk in the park – or anywhere. It can help children focus on what is around them and forget that they are walking. You can use this page as a checklist and challenge your child to tick of all the things in the list. Use a pencil then you can use the list again.



☐ Ladybird

☐ Woodlouse

☐ Spider

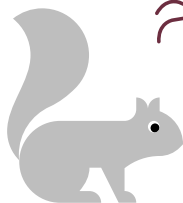
☐ Butterfly

☐ Bumble Bee

☐ London Plane tree

☐ Horse Chestnut tree

☐ Feather



☐ Pigeon

☐ Robin

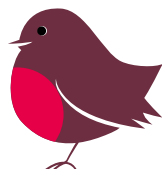
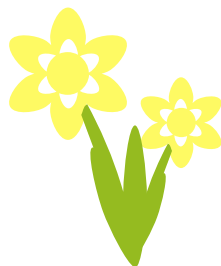
☐ Great Tit

☐ Crow

☐ Squirrel

☐ Flowers with yellow petals (e.g. Daffodil in Spring)

☐ Seed pod (e.g. Sycamore 'helicopter', Oak acorn or Horse Chestnut conker)



Family nature activities



Make a natural mobile

You will need string, tape and scissors.

Collect some leaves, feathers and sticks in the park.

Make a cross with two sticks and tie them in the middle or use tape if you don't have string. Tie a piece of string or thread to each of the four 'ends' of the crossed sticks and attach a feather or leaf to the end of each piece of string.

Hang it somewhere and watch it move in the breeze.

Make a bark rubbing

You will need wax crayons or chalk and paper.

Tree bark has different patterns and textures. You can transfer these patterns to paper by rubbing chalk or wax crayon over the pattern.

Place a piece of paper against the trunk of a tree and rub the side of a crayon or piece of chalk against the paper so that the texture of the bark underneath appears on the paper. Don't rub too hard.

Try this on different tree trunks to see the variety of bark patterns.

Make a nature collage

You will need paper and PVA glue.

Collect some leaves, twigs and feathers in the park.

At home, put a piece of paper out on some newspaper (this can get messy!) and help your child to stick the things you have collected onto the paper. You or they could draw a picture on the paper first or try and make an image out of the things you have collected.

Move like minibeasts (insects)

You won't need anything for this activity!

This is a great way to get young children active and burning off energy. Try doing this in the park. Challenge your kids (and yourself!) to:

- lie on the ground and wriggle like a worm
- flap their arms like a butterfly flutters its wings
- put their hands on the floor and scuttle about like a spider
- do some giant leaps like a grasshopper
- crawl on the floor then curl up into a ball like a woodlouse.



**“Love consists in desiring
to give what is our own to
another and feeling his
delight as our own.”**

(Emanuel Swedenborg)

