

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Land acknowledgements are a way to honour the land and its past inhabitants at the beginning of any gathering. This practice originated in North America, where it was used to raise awareness of the First Nations people and their ancestral and historic relationship to the land.

Every religion and culture has its own blessings and rituals for honouring creation, land and place. This land acknowledgement is not meant to replace any of these. Rather, it serves to highlight some of the complex and often painful histories that the land has seen.

At St Ethelburga's we were inspired by the North American practice of land acknowledgement, but knew that we needed to approach it slightly differently. We wrote this land acknowledgement to open a 4-day retreat in Devon. We knew that some participants would have a strong felt connection to the land we were on, a positive sense of England's history and mythology. Other participants had ancestral connection to lands far away, and their family histories contained painful ruptures with land through empire and colonisation. We tried to write something that could embrace different perspectives, and above all to connect us with the felt sense that the land itself was sacred.

These practices tend to work best when they are specific. Who are your participants? What histories do they bring? What land are you relating to? Land acknowledgement has sometimes generated controversy. Some people object that it has become overused, a form of performative virtue signalling. The solution to this is to take care to offer something that is sensitive to your context, your participants, and the land. We offer this as an example of how you might think about writing your own land acknowledgement. We hope it will inspire you!

Land acknowledgement

We thank this land and all of the beings within it, upon it and above it. This land supports us to stand with one another. This land gives us air to breathe and water to drink. This land feeds many beings, including us, and others in our human family. This land gives beauty that feeds our spirits. We thank this land for giving life.

We thank the ancestors of this land, both human and more than human. Everyone who has ever loved this land – we thank you.

There is a lot we don't know about this land. We don't know the whole history of this land, and of the people and other beings who have lived and died here. We will be imperfect in how we honour this land. Still, we want to try to show respect in the best way we can.

We know that humans have lived on this land for at least 35,000 years. We believe that for most of this period, the celtic and pre-celtic people lived close to the Land and knew that you were sacred. You taught them ceremonies, songs, and ways of relating to you that made a living bond between you, the land, and the people.



Later, there were many wars on this land. Romans, as well as other European, Germanic, and Northern peoples invaded and conquered this land. Through a long history of conquest and later on, land seizures by the aristocracy (also known as land enclosures), the people who lived close to this land, who knew your ways and loved you as a Mother, were separated from you.

We acknowledge the 300– year long practice of witch-burning, during which men, women and children were tortured and killed, often because they remembered the old Pagan ways and were close to the Earth.

We acknowledge that roughly 500 years ago the leaders of England sent out armies to conquer other lands around the world. This nation grew into a mighty Empire. At its height, the British Empire ruled over. 412 million people and laid claim to 35,500,000 km2 Or 24% of the Earth's total land area.

This violent colonisation and subjugation of peoples and land caused suffering on a scale that defies imagination.



The colonised lands were settled by newcomers from conquering nations. In the 20th century, most of the formerly colonised countries were restored to sovereignty from the British Empire. However the wounds of the past live on. The violent separation of ancestors from the lands that they loved and stewarded, and the imposition of the industrial growth society, has given rise to a global crisis. This crisis threatens to overwhelm and engulf us all, and many other beings.

We acknowledge that our world currently holds many displaced people and refugees, cut off from their homelands, and made to feel unwelcome in new lands.

We acknowledge all of the harms that have happened in the relationship between humans and the Earth, and between and against different groups in the human family. We long for healing and justice.

We acknowledge that some of us carry ancestral traumas and wounding from the violent separation of people from their lands. We honour all those who carry within themselves a living witness of past traumas, since witness is a sacred act of truth and courage.

We acknowledge that this land may remember the last ancestors who made ceremonies here. The land may miss its people.

All of us are descendants of ancestral lineages that trace back, if we go far enough back, to peoples who lived in close relationship to the Earth. Some of us may know of our ancestral lineages, and some may not. We ask for help to remember, how we may truly honour land.

We acknowledge that this land is sacred.

We honour the life and the death within this land, the light and the shadow.