

# 'WHO CARES FOR GOD'S ACRES?'

WRITTEN BY JON RICHES

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(WELCOME TO LITTLE WHITTLESEA - A  
VIBRANT VILLAGE COMMUNITY NESTLED  
IN THE ROLLING KENTISH COUNTRYSIDE  
- AS THEY CONFRONT THE PROPOSED  
NEW PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY  
WHICH THREATENS TO CHANGE THEIR  
IDYLIC IDENTITY FOR EVER!)

## CAST LIST

**COLONEL ERNEST BARTLETT:** Distinguished member of the Local Gentry. Chairman of the Little Whittlesea Parish Council. Still 'Military' in bearing – and outlook!

**TABITHA-ROSE CATTERMOLE:** New Regional Manager, Constant Maybee Property Developers. First Big Project!

**REV. JILL TOPLEY:** New Vicar of St. Winifred's Parish Church. A 'Coup' for the Village! A 'Northerner' regularly seen on TV and heard on BBC Religious Services programmes.

**QUENTIN TOOGOOD:** Golf Club Secretary. Retired Accountant. Stickler for rules, regulations – and facts!

**PERSEPHONE BARTLETT:** Local 'Bossy Boots'. An imposing figure with high office in many local organisations – W.I. President, Senior School Governor, Church Elder; Ladies Captain at the Golf Club. Soft centre perhaps?

**GORDON KNOWLESWORTH:** Local Solicitor – well-respected & connected. Chairman of the Little Whittlesea Am Dram Society.

**MARGARET SMITH:** Vivacious divorcee. Originally 'DFL' ('Down from London'), but now a passionate advocate on behalf of her adopted home. Am Dram 'Leading Light'.

**JOYCE ANDERSON:** Little Whittlesea native. Long-time Am Dram member. Housewife/Mother/Grandmother. Everybody's 'Friend'.

## STAGE SETTING

(A 'Consultative Meeting' between the Property Developers and Local 'Interested Parties' in the Church/Village Hall. Simple Table Setting, centre stage with eight chairs around)

## SCRIPT

**COLONEL BARTLETT: (Very Posh and Very Positive)** Right, well we've reached the appointed hour, so I intend to start this 'Consultative Meeting' concerning the proposed new Property Development for our village. .... **(Pause)** Yes, "Good Evening, everyone – and thank you for making the effort to be here!" .... Now, what should we do first? .... I know – let's all introduce ourselves and declare the interests we represent in being here. .... Everyone, OK with that? .... **(General nods of agreement)** Good, good – so let me start! .... Er, as most of you will know, I'm Colonel Bartlett and I'm here in my capacity as your Parish Council Chairman. .... And this lady on my right, Ms. Cattermole – who I met for the first time just before the meeting – is the new Regional Manager for our proposed partners, Constant Maybee PLC. .... So, why don't you introduce yourself, my dear!

**TABITHA-ROSE CATTERMOLE:** (Also posh – but Nervous) Oh, yes – well, Thank You, Mr. Chairman, er, Colonel Bartlett! ..... (Pause) And ‘Hello’ to everyone! ..... I’m Tabitha-Rose Cattermole and this is my first visit to your lovely village! ..... I hope to get to know you all in due course – and will try to answer all your questions about the exciting plans Constant Maybee has to put Little Whittlesea more prominently on the map! ..... Oh, and please feel free to call me ‘Tabby’ – all my friends and family do! ..... And I’ll feel much more comfortable if you .....

**COLONEL BARTLETT:** (Interrupting – with a mischievous laugh) Oh I say! ..... I really can’t quite believe that! ..... Your parents must have had a wicked sense of humour, given your surname – and SURELY you must have been known as ‘Tabby Cat’ all through your schooldays? ..... If not, then, I’m sorry, but you will be ‘Tabby Cat’ to me from now on! (Pause – then more wistfully) You know, I had a ‘tabby cat’ once – when I was a child! ..... I called him, ‘Montgomery’ – after the ‘General’, of course – and he was a great comfort to me. ..... Then one day, much to my amazement, HE turned into a SHE by producing a litter of sprogs! ..... (Pause – shaking his head) It was a salutary lesson for me to learn about the vagaries of the world at such a young age!

**PERSEPHONE BARTLETT:** **(Sharply)** Now that's quite enough of that, Barty! ..... These good people here are not interested in your interminable anecdotes! ..... **(Pause)** And for goodness sake stop 'Flirting' with this young lady! ..... Whatever will Ms. Cattermole think of us! ..... I suggest you get back to the business in hand – and quickly!

**COLONEL BARTLETT:** **(Cheerfully)** Righty-Ho, old girl! ..... **(Then aside to 'Tabby')** That's the good lady wife, by the way! ..... She ALWAYS knows what's best for me! **(Pause)** Now let's see, where were we? ..... Ah yes, we're all introducing ourselves – so let's see just who we have got here - and who I already know! ..... **(Looking around the table)** Ah, there's a familiar face – 'Knowlesworth', why don't you outline your interest?

**GORDON KNOWLESWORTH:** Thank you, Colonel – and 'Good Evening', Ms. Cattermole! ..... I'm Gordon Knowlesworth, Local Solicitor, and my role will be to help others understand the complexities of all the legal issues which I imagine will arise as the project develops! ..... **(Pause)** Oh, and I also happen to be the Chairman of our Amateur Dramatic Society, an organisation which has traditionally used this venue – and we are, therefore, very concerned about the planned future of this building!

**COLONEL BARTLETT:** Good, good - that's very clear! ..... Oh, by the way, Knowlesworth! ..... Do you think you could call on me at 'The Grange' sometime to discuss that 'Public Footpath' that runs across my orchard. .... Apparently, the Whitstable Wheelers Cycling Club claim it's really a general purpose 'Bridleway' and want to include it in a 'Cyclo-Cross Something or Other' they are creating! ..... Damn cheek!

**PERSEPHONE BARTLETT:** For 'Heaven's Sake', Barty! ..... NOT NOW!

**COLONEL BARTLETT:** What? ..... Oh yes, of course – must move on! ..... So, who is next? **(Looking round the table)** Ah, Toogood – there you are! ..... Another face I recognise!

**QUENTIN TOOGOOD:** Good to see you again, Colonel – and to meet you too, Ms Cattermole. .... My name is Quentin Toogood, and I am the Secretary of our Golf Club. .... And as you can perhaps imagine, there is great concern about your plans for our hallowed turf. .... There are many rumours circulating currently - so I'm hoping you can give me some **HARD FACTS** this evening to convey to our members!

**COLONEL BARTLETT:** **(Interrupting)** Yes, yes! ..... We'll get to all that detail in due course! ..... But we must move onto others now! **(Pause)** Oh, but as I **HAVE** got you, what progress is there on re-designating the 4<sup>th</sup> Hole from a Par 3 to a Par 4? ..... I'm one of the biggest hitters off the tee, but

even I can't reach the Green with my 'Big Bertha' driver! .....  
Dammit man, I've been on about this for at least the last  
two years!

**QUENTIN TOOGOOD: (Sighing – then quite sharply)** As I've  
told you many times before, Colonel – this is no simple  
matter! ..... Because our club is a registered 'Competition  
Course' within the Kent League and beyond, there are rules  
and procedures that need to be followed if any changes are  
proposed. .... We have submitted an application to the R &  
A in St. Andrews – the ultimate authority – and await their  
response! ..... We REALLY ARE doing all we.....

**PERSEPHONE BARTLETT: (Interrupting)** GENTLEMEN,  
ENOUGH! ..... Quentin, you should have known better than  
to indulge him – you know how he loves an audience! .....  
Now Barty, either YOU concentrate on tonight's business –  
or I will take over as Chair and stop this dreadful waste of  
everyone else's time! ..... DO I MAKE MYSELF CLEAR?

**COLONEL BARTLETT: (Sheepishly)** Oh dear, Tabby Cat! .....  
I'm afraid that's my 'Final Warning' – a kind of 'Yellow Card'  
in the modern parlance! Don't you know! **(Pause)** So it's my  
BEST BEHAVIOUR from now on – and you must help me! .....  
Right, now let me see. .... We've heard from the men, so  
let's move on to the ladies – and I must confess that I am  
not familiar with two of the charming people sitting  
opposite! ..... But, I do know our new Vicar, and suspect that



you might just have come across the name of the Rev. Jill Topley too, Tabby Cat? ..... You see our little village now boasts a real-live Television personality!

**TABITHA-ROSE CATTERMOLLE:** **(Excitedly)** Oh gosh, yes! ..... I mean, I've obviously seen you on TV, er, Your Grace - in shows like *'Blankety Blank'* and *'Have I Got News for You!'* – And we always have your Sunday Morning Radio Show on over breakfast at home! ..... **(Then puzzled)** But I must say, I was surprised to find you living in Kent – I, I always assumed you were from the North Country!

**REV. JILL TOPLEY:** **(In a 'Northern Accent')** Don't you worry about that, Luv! ..... It's a common-enough mistake! ..... After all, I've lived most of my life in Yorkshire, before movin' t'Manchester area for easy access t'BBC at Salford! ..... I'm down here now because me twin girls 'ave started at the University in Canterbury – and the Archbishop tipped me off that there was this livin' available here in Little Whittlesea! ..... **(Pause)** And so far, I'm absolutely lovin' it – so 'Thank you very much', Justin!

**COLONEL BARTLETT:** And very pleased we are to have you here, Vicar! ..... A breath of fresh air after dear old Rev. Duxbury retired! ..... Bless him! **(Pause)** And just for the record, Vicar, I assume your involvement this evening is on behalf of your masters, the Church Commission – who, of course, own the land that is to be developed?

**REV. JILL TOPLEY: (Thoughtfully)** ‘Appen that is a very good question, Colonel! ..... You’re right about the Church Commission, of course, and I WILL need to keep Lambeth Palace informed – especially as they’ve formally nominated me as the local contact with the Developers. .... But .....

**TABITHA-ROSE CATTERMOLLE: (Interrupting – Obviously ‘Starstruck’)** Yes, yes that’s quite correct! ..... In fact, it’s the way I learned I was to be given the opportunity to work directly with a **(Flustered)** with a real-live, er, a **(Pause)** a ‘CELEBRITY’!

**COLONEL BARTLETT: (Twinkling mischievously)** OH YES, that must be thrilling for you, Tabby Cat! ..... Just think what it’s like for us mere mortals to be able to meet her walking around the village on any old day of the week! ..... And would you believe it, the numbers are up at St. Winifred’s for our ‘Weekly Service’ – which is “*Never on a Sunday - Morning*”, of course! ..... The Nation’s needs take priority for that time via the BBC! ..... Why, there is even talk about reviving the Church Choir, which unfortunately died some years ago along with poor Miss Garland, the organist! ..... **(Then more seriously)** But I don’t think you quite finished your introduction, did you, Vicar? ..... I seem to recall there was a ‘BUT’ coming!

**REV. JILL TOPLEY:** Yer right there, Colonel! ..... I do indeed have a 'Big BUT', actually! ..... **(Pause then - Laughing to herself)** Did I really just say that! ..... Good job I wasn't on't Telly – or the complaints would come rolling in! ..... 'Anyroad', (as we say in Sheffield) I've also just thought of somethin' quite ridiculous! ..... This company, Constant Maybee – wherever did they get that name from? ..... I looked at it and I thought, "Can they really be serious about what they do?" ..... It just struck me that a better name might be 'The Will They, Won't They Company' – and I can't get that out of my mind! ..... **(Pause)** That's not very professional of me, I know, and I apologise, Tabitha!

**TABITHA-ROSE CATTERMOLE:** **(Keenly)** There's no need to do that, 'Your Grace', or 'Your Reverence' is it? ..... I get comments like those all the time from my friends! ..... **(Pause)** All I can do is repeat the fact that the Company has been among the 'Top 4' Property Developers in the UK for the last 50 years! ..... It's quite an interesting story, actually! ..... Two family Businesses, in much the same markets, in the small town of Ashby-de-la Zouch! ..... Er, that's in Leicestershire, I think - or somewhere up north anyway! ..... There'd been talk of a merger for some years apparently – and it finally happened in 1964, when the son of one family married the daughter of the other! ..... And the end result has been today's successful FTSE 100 Company!

**COLONEL BARTLETT:** Oh I say, what a splendid story, Tabby Cat! ..... **(Chuckling)** And don't tell me, but I guess the delay in that merger was because one of the parties just kept saying, "*Maybe*" ..... What!

**PERSEPHONE BARTLETT:** BARTY! ..... I won't warn you again!

**COLONEL BARTLETT:** OK, ok old girl. .... Just couldn't resist that one, I'm afraid! **(Pause)** So, I think it's back to you Vicar – to tell us more about your 'BUT'! ..... **(Then quickly)** And I hasten to add that I'm not being 'personal' here! ..... It's a 'BUT' with one 'T', not two!

**REV. JILL TOPLEY:** Ay, but before I do, can I just put you right on a couple of points, Tabitha? ..... First, I'd prefer it if you just called me 'Jill' in future. .... 'Your Reverence' or 'Your Grace' them's not for me! ..... They're more for the Archbishop – and I don't really think that Justin will concern himself with this kind of issue. .... OK, with that, Luv? ..... And secondly, 'Leicestershire' is in the Midlands, rather than 'Up North'! ..... Granted IT IS 'North of London', but you would insult anyone from Yorkshire – or even Lancashire for that matter – if you included that part of the world in 'God's Own Country'! ..... **(Pause)** Right – now I've got that out of the way, let me tell you my reservation about bein' involved with this project! ..... I think I'm in a pretty delicate situation here, because by definition, I'll be wearing two hats! ..... The Church Commission role we all

understand! ..... BUT don't forget that I'm also the Vicar of this Parish – and ANYTHIN' that concerns my parishioners, naturally concerns me! ..... Yes, I can see myself siding with either or both sides as this debate develops!

**COLONEL BARTLETT:** Did you hear that, Tabby Cat? ..... That's a bit of a shock, I must say! ..... I'd assumed that the Vicar would be on our team, but she's right, of course, she probably needs to be seen as an 'Independent' – or even as a 'Crossbencher', to use a Parliamentary analogy! ..... How very exciting! ..... **(Pause)** OK, now let's see who else is here! ..... **(Looking round the table)** Ah yes, Persephone – why don't you tell us which of your many responsibilities you are batting for tonight? **(Aside to 'Tabby')** The Goodwife has a finger in most pies in the village - the W.I., the School Board, the Church Lay Management, the Golf Club! ..... I very rarely know exactly which cause she is fighting for at any particular time!

**PERSEPHONE BARTLETT:** I think it is blindingly obvious, Barty, that my major interest is the fate of this Church Hall facility – which serves so many of the Community's needs and organisations! ..... But it won't surprise you to learn that I will feel free to comment on ANY issue arising – if it helps bring clarity to this mess! ..... I certainly have views on the Golf Club's predicament!

**QUENTIN TOOGOOD:** **(Graciously)** And I shall be very pleased to take advice from you, Persephone – as the need arises! ..... I'm in no doubt, the members will be thrilled to know you are in their corner!

**COLONEL BARTLETT:** Good, good! ..... That's very clear! ..... Now let's see who we have left! ..... **(Looking round the table)** Ah, just the two ladies either side of you, Persephone! ..... So, if one of you would care to go next?

**JOYCE ANDERSON:** Why don't you go next, Margaret? ..... You're much better at speaking at meetings than me – and I'm sure the Parish Council will be far more interested in your views than mine!

**MARGARET SMITH:** I rather doubt that is true, Joyce! ..... After all, you more than anyone else here, have the right to be heard – having been born and lived all your life in our wonderful village! ..... The rest of us, and **(Pointing)** that includes you, Colonel, are simply 'Incomers'! ..... and

**COLONEL BARTLETT:** **(Interrupting)** Oh, I say – that's sounds very much like 'Fighting Talk' to me! ..... And, of course, I am highly trained in that sphere...

**PERSEPHONE BARTLETT:** **(Cutting him short)** You will do well, Barty, NOT to underestimate either of these two 'Champions of our Village! ..... Joyce here is one of my

highly valued 'W.I. Girls', and Margaret, although originally a 'DFL', has most successfully integrated herself into the rhythms of our village life! **(Pause)** Oh, and incidentally, they are BOTH stalwart members of our beloved Am Dram Society – WHICH WE ARE NOT GOING TO ALLOW TO DIE!

**COLONEL BARTLETT:** **(Addressing 'Gordon')** It looks very much as if you have come 'Mob Handed', Knowlesworth! ..... Didn't appreciate just how much this old building seems to mean to everybody! ..... **(Then to 'Tabby')** I hope you have details of the latest plans for it, Tabby Cat?

**TABITHA-ROSE CATTERMOLE:** **(Frantically shuffling papers)** Oh dear! ..... I'm not sure that there is too much detail as yet! ..... It has never been seen as a 'Priority Issue'! ..... Let me check with my boss. **(She reaches for her phone – and begins to type a message)**

**(Sounds and gestures of general dismay from the three ladies!)**

**GORDON KNOWLESWORTH:** Well, Colonel – you can see the immediate reaction to that piece of news! ..... And I have to say, I too am extremely disappointed in this response from Constant Maybee! ..... It is quite obvious to me that they have not done their 'Due Diligence' about our community – which is very disappointing! ..... If they HAD done it, they would realise just what a vital role this Hall plays in village

life! ..... Apart from hosting regular meetings– including your Parish Council – it caters for all manner of W.I. activities; The Scouts and Brownie groups; weekly Art and Pilates classes; it is a venue available to everyone for celebrations and occasions like our own ‘Am Dram Season’; not to mention it’s prime function! ..... Which is, of course, the Church’s Pre-School Child Care and Creche Centre! ..... I would think the Vicar may have something to say about that.

**REV. JILL TOPLEY:** By ‘eck, you’re right there, Gordon! ..... It’s an absolute necessity to have this facility in our village - with so many parents needing to travel outside for their work! ..... **(Pause)** So there we ‘ave it, Colonel – the first example of me Parish duties needin’ to take priority! ..... That didn’t take long, did it?

**COLONEL BARTLETT:** **(Clearly rattled)** Now look here, Knowlesworth, that’s very, er, very strong, er - LANGUAGE! ..... And not necessary at this stage of proceedings, I declare! ..... It’s, er, it’s ‘EARLY DAYS’ for this project, er, and - Yes, I’m sure you’ll get all the answers you need in due course!

**PERSEPHONE BARTLETT:** **(Feigning ‘Sweetness’)** And I THINK you would be advised to ensure you are well ‘Padded Up’, Barty! ..... It looks to me as if you may have chosen to bat on a decidedly ‘Sticky Wicket’!



**COLONEL BARTLETT:** (Struggling to resume 'Control') Oh, that's very droll, old girl! ..... But, no need to concern yourself about me! ..... (Pause – then more cheerfully) Now look, in everybody's interest, let's complete the round of 'Introductions' – and then Tabby Cat can give us the latest news from the Developers! ..... OK with that? ..... (Nods all round) Good, good – so let's go back to the lady who was so keen to 'Take me on' earlier!

**MARGARET SMITH:** (Sarcastically) Oh, that would be me, I suppose! ..... Right, now what do I need to tell you? ..... (Pause) Well, my name is 'Margaret Smith', and I've been associated with this village for the last 20 plus years, living here full-time since 2012. .... My career has embraced various Government Agencies and my main interests now are 'Anything Environmental'. .... I'm a volunteer 'Friend of Natural England' – and I'm very angry about the way this beautiful part of the country is being 'Concreted Over' to accommodate more and more people that we do NOT need! ..... (Another pause) Oh yes, and I'm one, a very passionate one, of Gordon's Am Dram 'MOB' – as you so charmingly called us!

**COLONEL BARTLETT:** (Teasingly) Well, Tabby Cat! ..... We appear to have uncovered a potential 'Activist' in the opposition's ranks! ..... But not to worry, "*Forewarned is forearmed*" as the saying goes! ..... (Pause) Now, that just

leaves us with Knowlesworth's other actress sitting next to the Goodwife – so perhaps we could finally complete this round of introductions, by hearing from you, my dear?

**JOYCE ANDERSON:** (Somewhat surprised – and nervous) Oh yes, of course – and I'll be quick! ..... My name is 'Joyce Anderson', Tabitha, and I'm just a, a – a housewife! ..... (Pause – then more confidently) I suppose, in that role, I represent all the ordinary people in the village who use this Hall regularly - for whatever reason! (Pause) Is, is that all right?

**TABITHA-ROSE CATTERMOLE:** (Sympathetically) Yes – that's absolutely perfect, Joyce! ..... Thank you! ..... (Addressing the Colonel) If you don't mind, Mr. Chairman – I think I would like to know more about this building, which, I must say, is much bigger and older than I was expecting! ..... My brief, from Head Office, is not terribly enlightening – so I wonder if someone could bring me up to speed about it's history?

**COLONEL BARTLETT:** Yes, I think I'm possibly in need of a bit of a 'refresher' too, Tabby Cat! ..... And I suspect that Joyce, who has lived in Little Whittlesea all her life, we are told, will be best placed to give us that information! ..... Can you do that for us, my dear?

**JOYCE ANDERSON:** (Again 'nervous') Oh well, do you think I can! (Pause) You don't think, Gordon would be a better.....

**MARGARET SMITH:** (Interrupting – encouragingly) Of course, you can do it, Joyce! ..... Just imagine we are all performing another one of our Plays together – and this is your 'Big Moment' to take Centre Stage!

**GORDON KNOWLESWORTH:** Well said, Margaret! ..... You know how much you love being on stage, Joyce – and that's exactly how you should see this, this opportunity! ..... We are confident you will do us proud – as always!

**JOYCE ANDERSON:** (More confidently) Well if you think so! (Pause) Right! ..... This is what I know! ..... The original building probably dates from the late 1890's or early 1900's and my Great Grandfather was one of the Labourers – so my Grannie told me! ..... Then between the wars, the building was extended to include the Stage area with both a loft space above and a basement below! ..... Now these are quite special or unique in buildings of this type - according to my son-in-law (Proudly) He's an architect, you know! ..... (Pause) I'm not sure, but I think there might have been plans to use it as a temporary Grain Store in WW II – but I DO KNOW the Bells from St. Winifred's were safely stored in the basement for the duration of that war!

**REV. JILL TOPLEY:** (**Butting in**) I did not know that! .... What a lovely 'Community Story' – I might use that in my next sermon! .... Thank you so much for telling me, Joyce!

**JOYCE ANDERSON:** Oh, you're very welcome, Vicar! ..... And I can tell you lots more stories – if you wish! ..... Like when the big Oak Tree came down on the Church in the Great Storm of 1987 – or when the Scouts Bonfire Night got out of control in the Car Park, and the whole building was.....

**COLONEL BARTLETT:** Yes, yes – er, Joyce, isn't it! ..... I think we get the general picture, so 'Thank you'! – but we must move on now!

**REV. JILL TOPLEY:** (**Aside to Joyce**) Don't you worry, Joyce! ..... Give me your phone number, and I'll invite you round t'Vicarage for a cuppa and a good old chinwag! (**Pause**) I take it you like a nice brew of 'Yorkshire Tea'!

**(All through these exchanges, 'Quentin Toogood' has been agitating and gesticulating – trying to attract attention.)**

**COLONEL BARTLETT:** (**Spotting this**) Is there something you wish to say, at this stage, Toogood? ..... Waving your arms around like that, what is it, man? ..... Speak up!

**QUENTIN TOOGOOD:** Apologies, Colonel – but it was Gordon, rather than you, I was trying to alert! ..... Perhaps I could pass him this note!