



Basic Black by Arthur Black

Bring out your dead

Poor beleaguered Britain. Not enough that she suffers from a boggy, dank climate, wretched cuisine, a tragically dysfunctional royal family and a tiresome houseguest named Conrad who Will Not Go Home. Now it turns out she's got too many dead people as well.

Blighty's burial grounds (all 25,000 of them) have been doing a brisk trade for many a moon - in some cases for centuries—and they are pretty much filled to capacity. The boneyards are so overcrowded that the U.K. government is presently mulling over adoption of a burial process known in the trade as "lift and deepen". Sounds like copy for a brassiere ad, but it actually refers to a technique of exhuming coffins already in place and re-burying them at a deeper level. That way, several additional coffins can be stacked on top of hem. Kind of a layer-cake approach to interment. As usual, Britain is opting for a piecemeal solution to the problem instead of thinking outside the box, as it were.

Why not just construct a

brand spanking new Necropolis? An entire city dedicated solely to dead people? It's not exactly an original notion. The state of California did it years ago.

The city's name is Colma. You'll find it about five miles south of San Francisco. Its peaceful ambiance and graceful, tree-lined streets are home to one and a half million souls. And I mean souls. They're all dead. What's more, they're mostly out-of-towners. The large, space-strapped city of San Francisco has been shipping out its expired burghers to the smaller city of Colma since 1924.

Are there any live people in town? Yes, but only about 1,200, all nervously upbeat (most popular bumper sticker 'IT'S GREAT TO BE ALIVE IN COLMA')—as befits a citizenry which finds itself outnumbered more than 100-1 by corpses.

It all started back in 1901 when San Francisco city fathers, alarmed at the rate their cemeteries were filling up, banned the designation of any new burying grounds within the city limits. Not only that, they began clear-

ing out the cemeteries they did have. Where to put all those exhumed bones? Oh, how about, say, five miles down the road? Thus was Colma's destiny determined. Today, there are 17 burial grounds in Colma as well as five more nestled on the outskirts of town. In addition to non-denominational plots there are four Jewish cemeteries, also two Chinese, an Italian, a Japanese, a Serbian and a Greek Orthodox burial ground. But you don't have to be ethnic to spend eternity in Colma. You don't even have to be solvent. They have a

paupers graveyard too.

Colma's underground guest list even includes a couple of celebrities. The famous gunslinger Wyatt Earp is planted in Colma along with his wife Josephine. So is George Moscone, the ex-mayor of San Francisco who was offed by a disgruntled employee back in 1978.

Of course, back in 1924, California had a luxury that Great Britain hasn't enjoyed for some time - oodles of wide open spaces. Nowadays the whole world is getting overcrowded and no doubt the day will come when even Colma will be unable to shoehorn another cadaver into the ground.

Perhaps by then we'll have given some sober second thought to the whole barbaric practice of embalming and rouging corpses; of dressing them up and laying them out in opulent, over-priced brass-and-mahogany sarcophagi as if we expected them to rise up and ask for the next dance at any moment.

Besides, the graveside is a little late in the game of life to be expressing our love and devotion to a party that clearly doesn't have much use for it any more.

As Calgary Bob Edwards said "Give us the flowers now and you don't need to bring any to our funeral".

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Ontarians thanked for book donations

TORONTO, Feb. 28 /CNW/ - The Lieutenant Governor today thanked Ontarians for their overwhelming generosity in donating books for First Nations schools in Ontario's north. The Hon. James K. Bartleman also estimated that more than 500,000 books will have been collected by the end of this weekend when the campaign concludes.

"I am very impressed by the response from individuals, community groups, private sector organizations and elected officials. When I announced the program in January, I was hoping we would receive 100,000 books for 33 First Nations communities accessed only by winter roads. To have surpassed that goal at least fivefold is indeed heartwarming. I will now provide books to many other First Nation communities in northern Ontario, including those with road access." Mr. Bartleman paid tribute to the thousands of people who have participated in the program.

"There are too many people for me to thank personally, who have contributed books or who have worked above and beyond the call of duty, who have made a difference in the lives of individuals in the north," Mr. Bartleman said, "I would like, however, to commend the tremendous support, cooperation and partnership of the Department of National Defence (DND) and the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP)."

The DND provided space at the Downsview Airforce Base to sort and package the high volume of books. The 3rd Canadian Ranger Patrol Group, a mainly Aboriginal reserve unit of the Canadian Forces, has already transported more than 40,000 books to 16 northern communities.

Each OPP detachment served as a collection depot

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