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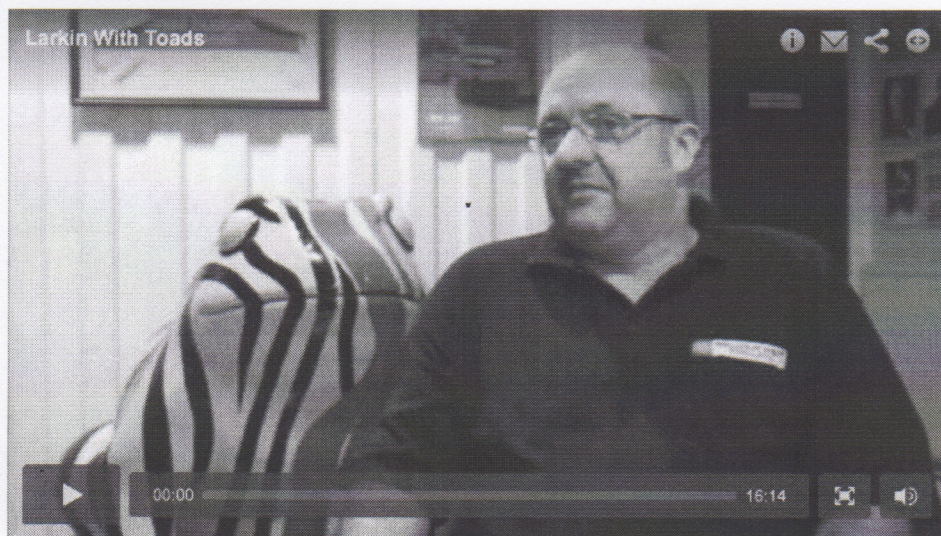
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## Video: From Hull to Oz, warts and all

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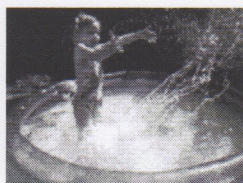
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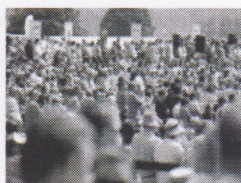
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**It stopped people in their tracks before hopping off with a string of plaudits.**

But now a Hull arts project has spawned a successor – 10,000 miles Down Under.

Larkin with Toads, the main event in celebrations marking the 25th anniversary of the poet's death, which saw 40 fibreglass toads released onto the city's streets in 2010, is credited with inspiring Hello Koalas.

Officials in Port Macquarie in New South Wales – known for its miles of stunning beach and koala hospital – are already hard at work on the project, which will see a number of events leading up to a grand unveiling in 2015.

They've been won over by the success of Larkin with Toads, which generated around £1m for the city's economy, gave it some of the best publicity in years, and is still fondly remembered.

The Australian project developed after a meeting between the Cottingham-based arts consultant Elaine Burke, who spearheaded Larkin with Toads, and the executive director of Arts and Health Australia Margret Meagher at a gathering at Durham University in 2011.

A documentary produced by Hull-based film-maker Dave Lee helped convince the local council and businesses to sign up to the project.

As in Hull the larger-than-life fibreglass sculptures will be kept under wraps until dawn breaks on the day of the event.

Ms Burke, who visited Port Macquarie last year, said: "The great thing about Toads was that the business sector jumped on board and really got behind it.

"We were able to demonstrate the effect it had on the economy but also the social impact around peoples' pride and tourism. It is that which won over not just the council, but businesses.

"Numbers haven't been finalised but there will be at least 50. They are entirely basing it around the toads so they will be around the same size, 1m square.

"We visited a fibreglass manufacturer and they got very excited about being involved, having never done anything like this before. They will be working with artists of high-calibre, including ones acclaimed nationally to decorate the koalas beautifully.

"It's about strengthening social bonds, offering people something wonderful, which families and everyone can participate in."

Despite obvious differences – Port Macquarie has a population of just 75,000 spread over a large area and is known as a retirement destination – there are similarities, said Ms Burke.

"It has a river running through it. It used to have a thriving forestry industry which is in decline. It has 27 kms of stunning beaches, but a bit like Hull it kind of gets overlooked.

"They have held an Iron Man triathlon every year but what they have wanted is a signature cultural event to put Port Macquarie on the map as part of a regeneration strategy.

"Margret read my reports at Durham and heard me speak about it and thought this is the event they were looking for and the fact the impacts were so clearly defined gave her something clear to work with. She went home with a suitcase full of reports and spread them round the council and other people.

"The council read them and said: 'Yes, this makes perfect sense'."

Ms Meagher said: "We hope to promote health and well-being as people are encouraged to explore the Hello Koala trail and enjoy being out and about.

"We also want to raise awareness of the importance of koala care and conversation and highlight the significant work of the Koala Hospital in Port Macquarie and establish Port Macquarie Hastings as the home of the koala."

The Koala Hospital cares for koalas injured through bushfire, dog attacks and collisions with cars. The iconic marsupial was recently listed as "vulnerable to extinction."

The toads - which attracted about 120,000 people to the "toad trail" - cost £258,000 to create. The sculptures were later auctioned off, raising £50,000 for good causes and arts projects.

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