

Background information supporting the integrated application to heritage list both Big Penguin & the town's 12 penguin-themed garbage bins

It is arguable that the Big Penguin and 12 penguin-themed garbage bins, maintained by the community, are rare examples of seaside street folk art in Tasmania, and indeed Australia. Folk art, by definition, reflects the historical and ongoing cultural life of a community expressing the culture associated with its very being.

The Big Penguin and themed bins demonstrate ongoing community pride and initiative honouring and celebrating its namesake, two of the most notable landmarks across Tasmania, and indeed Australia. [Penguin Makeover Committee](#)

The small coastal town of Penguin in NW Tasmania is unusual in that its CBD street, named Main Street, has the beach on one side and commerce the other. The beachfront Town Square is home to the town's iconic Big Penguin and some of the themed garbage bins; five within 10-15 metres, the remainder 100-200 metres. All situated along the picturesque CBD foreshore. These two artworks are famous across Australia, helped more recently by the ABC's 2020 Backroads TV series showcasing the town to over a million people. They appear on a galore of tourism and other websites including Wikipedia. There's also [the Ambling among Penguin's charms app](#). Both penguin and bins are the town's most photographed attractions against the stunning backdrop of Bass Strait.

The Big Penguin was installed in 1975 on the centenary of Penguin being gazetted a town, the town named after its annual influx of breeding Tiny (once called Fairy) penguins. [Big Penguin](#) The 3.15m artwork was installed on the wave of a nation-wide community diet to celebrate towns each with its own 'Big Thing', of which there are now over 230 across Australia; 39 in Tasmania. [Australia's big things](#) And while a handful are named after animals only one, Penguin, marries its Big Thing to the town's name and historical origins, its unambiguous wildlife. And Tasmania's penguins are a huge drawcard nationally. In this regard the Big Penguin is unique across Australia. Additionally, it's possibly Australia's only Big Thing that can boast of an extensive wardrobe. The community has dressed the iconic penguin in an array of themed costumes, some 15 to date and still counting (Christmas, Easter, Anzac Day, Valentine's Day, various town fundraising events, & so on). It started on New Year's Day 2002 when locals and visitors first saw their penguin dressed in a Superman suite replete with underpants and the famous 'S'. [Who dresses Tasmania's giant penguin](#)

Local grocer George Daniels conceived of the idea of creating a Big Penguin. Supported by then Penguin Municipal Council, the engineering firm of RM Foster was asked to prepare construction plans, drawn up by chief draftsman Carl Johnson. A Hobart company engaged to build the penguin pulled out at short notice. October 7 1975 Council asked Goliath Cement's David Lawrie if they could build the penguin for the centenary celebrations on October 25, which they did. The penguin was unveiled by America's Qantas sales manager John Rowe, who was raised in Penguin till aged 8.

We cannot verify if the Big Penguin was the only one of Tasmania's Big Things built by Goliath Cement but it was definitely the first. Goliath Cement features heavily in Tasmanian history. There was no mention in Mr Lawrie's diaries or in the 'Goliath News' circulated to all employees, of the company having previously built a Big Thing [The story of the Big Penguin](#)

Goliath Cement, previously The Tasmanian Cement Company, became one of the north-west coast's most successful industries (having an association with post-war immigrants), constructing buildings and infrastructure across Tasmania and the mainland including the Sydney Harbour Bridge ([Rimon, p.164](#)).

The story of the penguin-themed garbage bins is less familiar though former federal senator Christine Milne did specifically mention their predecessor bins in her January 1993 journal article published in *Tasmanian Historical Studies* entitled: 'History & Heritage - Tourism, interpretation & publication. She wrote: 'In Penguin there is a giant cement penguin, there are penguin-shaped rubbish bins, but there has been, historically, very little effort to protect the fairy penguins and their rookeries'. These were tall metal bins painted blue, white and black shaped like a penguin. The rubbish was put in the mouth. These bins were difficult for the public to use and a nuisance for the council to empty.

Penguin resident Dale Crawford is the National Lions Co-ordinator of Youth & Community, which oversees all Leo Clubs across Australia. He recalls, as one of about 15 members of Penguin Leos back then that these penguin-shaped bins were the brainchild of Penguin's Leo Club. They started correspondence with council in June 1979, but after many letters decided to purchase them themselves. The bins were found at Cartlidges Agencies in Invermay Launceston during March/April 1980, each costing \$54.50. By July, after receiving a letter from council, they decided not to buy the bins after all, rather to pour the slabs themselves. The bins were erected 31 December 1980, 8 April 1981 and 2 May 1981. In all 10 bins were erected.

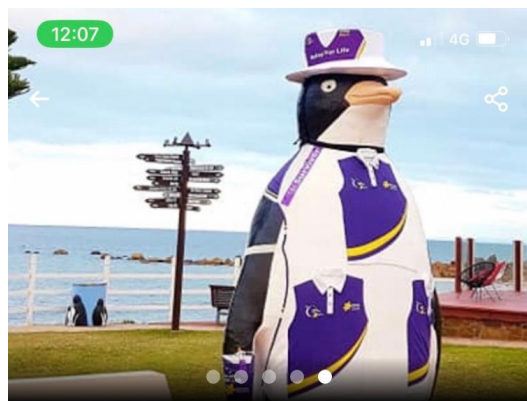
Penguin-themed garbage bins honouring and celebrating the town's name and origins have been a feature of the town for 42 years and were started by [Penguin's Leo Club](#). Penguin Lions Club has been operating for over 50 years and is host to the oldest continually operating Leo Club in Australia thereby demonstrating the ongoing strength of community spirit in Penguin. Dale believes the Penguin Leo Club started in the latter part of the 1970s.

North-West local artist Jenny-Lee Hutton created the current bins in 1995/96 from an Arts Tasmania Creative Communities Fund grant to council. She created four maquettes (models) displayed at Penguin community meetings during April 1996 from which the community chose the current version. Superimposing her folk art onto the council-donated pipes was a challenge. It involved enveloping the pipes with her clay mould then covering these with more than 30 layers of latex to yield perfect 3-D impressions. From these she made the fibreglass shells, which were filled with cement and attached to the pipes. Initially council painted the artwork just one colour but this soon changed in alignment with Jenny-Lee's vision.

As an aside, Jenny-Lee at 13 was Tasmania's under-16s female yoyo champion. These days she's a glass artist in Port Sorrel, having spent 2005 being mentored fulltime by Tasmania's master glass artist Julian Bamping. Her interest in creating the folk art bins was to reflect the closeness of family and community while lamenting the inevitable loss of Penguin's unique wildlife due to foreshore urbanisation.

History records the look and feel of a place, and how these evolve over time. Yesterday will become tomorrow's heritage. But more so it captures a sense of the townsfolk and their evolution as a community. The Town Square Big Penguin and 12 penguin-themed CBD garbage bins exemplify a small community embracing its name and historical roots through public art. Artwork that has huge community value, pride and attachment through years of volunteer labour devoted to its ongoing maintenance. That volunteering being formalised into the incorporated Penguin Makeover Committee. And now the penguin-themed garbage bins are under threat from council.

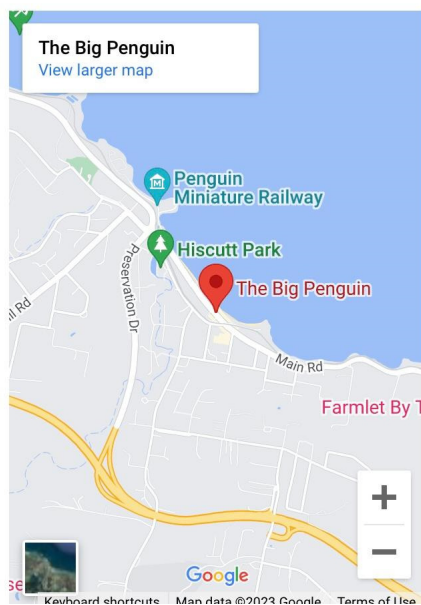
Penguin may be unique across Australia, the only town having its Big Thing and themed garbage bins named after the town, which had been named after its major tourist attraction, though now mostly gone, leaving only cement and fibreglass replicas.



The Advocate Thursday December 11 1980



Map



"It has been a long three... Mr. Durin wished to ac... I want to thank the ever... I know the parks trust as... begins as a glass and brackish"

Makeover for town's iconic rubbish bins

THE iconic Penguin rubbish bins have received a makeover as the community rallies together to secure their longevity on the Coast.

The Penguin Makeover Community have taken to the streets to give the bins a fresh coat of paint and mend and polish the metal tops.

The group, dedicated to the beautification and upkeep of Penguin, hopes the refurbishments will support the conservation of bins, which have been a mainstay in the town for over 30 years.

Penguin Makeover Community president Libby Burton said the repairs should strengthen their case to keep the bins.

"They're going to look brand spanking new when we've done with them," Mrs Burton said.

"We're nearly finished painting them now, and we have a welder coming to fix the bins, so they're easier to open. He'll polish them up too.

"When we're finished, we are hoping to put our case of saving the bins forward to the council, so they can continue to be a feature of our town."

Mrs Burton said the group is also on the hunt for information about the history of the bins, saying they would love for anyone to get in touch about their know.

"We feel very strong about these bins and they are an important part of Penguin's identity as a streetscape," she said.

"They are iconic, and they are part of what makes Penguin unique. We hope the council will see this and introduce additional bins rather than replace the existing ones."

—STEPHANIE D

Penguin Makeover Community take to the streets to refurbish the iconic Penguin bins to ensure they remain a feature of the town. Picture supplied.

The Advocate Friday 3 February 2023

The Advocate, Wednesday, March 6, 2002

Story of Penguin's landmark revealed

By Aaron Oldaker

WHILE Ulverston celebrates 150 years of history this month, the Penguin History Group is taking the opportunity for historical reflection on its own corner of the Central Coast Municipality.

An untold story of Penguin's centenary in 1975 concerns the origins of the famous big penguin in the town's main street.

After other negotiations had fallen through, the former Penguin Council asked Colalish Consent at Hailton to take over the project of creating the giant penguin which stands today.

With only 10 days to spare till the centenary celebrations were due to begin, the council members pondered the "facelift" operation, the sculptor Beau Bessie.

In his 40 years at Colalish, Mr Bessie said that the penguin made an unusual change from the standard job - concrete tanks and related products.

"Once we made some acid tanks that were sent to Britain but they were fairly straightforward," Mr Bessie said.

"If the penguin kept me busy for a week, I was presented with the challenge on a Friday, inside the place over the weekend and finished it the following Friday."

"We'd decided we didn't want to let Penguin down, but it was something we couldn't really plan because nothing had ever been done like it before," he said.

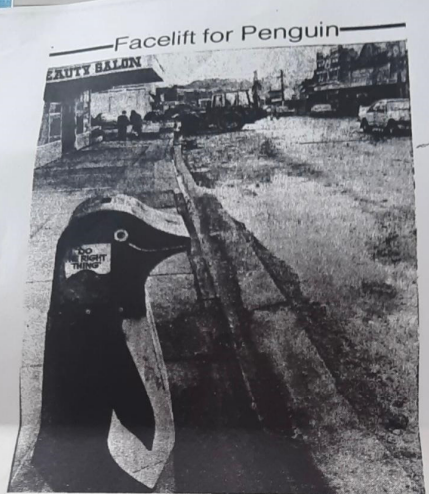
According to Central Coast councillor Warren Berker, recognition for the effort involved in creating the big penguin was long overdue.

"Colalish were the heroes throughout the whole thing because if it wasn't for them, we wouldn't have had anything to unveil, and the big penguin was a real cornerstone of the whole celebration."



HISTORY UNCOVERED: The origins of the famous big penguin have been uncovered by the Penguin History Group. Picture: Stuart Wilson.

Facelift for Penguin



Penguin's Main St will be part of the Australian Bicentenary Road program.

Work has already started on a total reconstruction of the street from the Bass Highway to Cann St, with the first part of the work to be completed by mid-October.

The total cost of the project is \$325,000.

The Federal Government will give \$175,000 for the work, and the council will use some of its annual Grants Commission allocation of personal income tax funds over the next five years, totalling \$125,000, plus a lump sum of \$25,000 from rate revenue to meet the balance of the cost.

The first section of the work, from Cann St to the railway line, will cost \$135,000, and will provide a 7m carriageway with new kerb and channelling and concrete footpaths.

Paved parking areas on both sides of the road will have sections of landscaping to soften the street line.

● Penguin's main street... undergoing reconstruction

Practical penguin bins

PENGUIN'S unique penguin rubbish bins have long been a source of amusement for visitors and locals alike, but the much-photographed receptacles have been upstaged by a larger and more practical variety.

The new concrete bins, which feature an exterior moulded around depicting the delightful fairy penguins after which the town was named, were designed by local artist Jenny Lee-Hutton in collaboration with council staff.

Central Coast Council received a \$6132 Tasmanian Arts Council grant for the project, which was initiated under the Penguin Cultural Plan.

Community development manager Susan Smailes said a survey had shown that local residents felt the old tin penguin-shaped containers were an important feature of the central business district.

However, it was considered impractical to replace them with bins of a similar design.

"The old bins couldn't be cleaned properly and council staff had difficulty emptying them," she said.

POPULAR Penguin's new garbage bin holders, featuring the fairy penguins after which the town was named, are admired by from left Tony Foster, Tania Smith, Sandra Robson and Penguin Traders Association chairman Alan Robson.

Eight of the new bins have been temporarily located in Main Rd pending a visit in February by Queensland landscape architect John Mongard, when they will be incorporated into permanent positions. Mr Mongard developed the Penguin Cultural Plan in 1995.

Long-time resident Mr Jack Hennessy was also impressed with the design.

"They look very good," he said.

"Everyone thinks they are fabulous and if the design can be incorporated into planter boxes to extend the theme it will be terrific," he said.

It is expected the cost of providing additional multi-purpose containers will be minimal as a fibreglass mould of the prototype can be easily produced.

ADVOCATE 28-12-96

20 - The Advocate, Tuesday, June 11, 1996

Spectrum

Penguin bins get a revamp

FAIRY penguins made of cement are moving into the Coastal township of Penguin.

The penguins are to replace the old rubbish tins, which have served the community for many years.

Potter Jenny-Lee Hutton said she researched far and wide to find good examples of the fairy penguins because most penguin pictures used commercially are a generalisation of what penguins look like rather than a particular species.

To a certain degree Jenny-Lee has had to follow this generalisation, to make the moulded penguins recognisable to the public.

Jenny-Lee, who has been working with clay for 13 years, said she makes the penguins out of clay which are then moulded in cement and attached to cement bins that contain a liner - making them easy to clean and empty.

The Central Coast Council received a grant from Arts Tasmania to revamp the bins, to complement the Sound of Waves theme which is Penguin's vision for its cultural plan.

Jenny-Lee usually specialises in crystalline glasses on bowls and vases but is also experimenting in slumped and fused glass - making platters and dishes in glass.

Before Christmas Jenny-Lee opened a shop in Kings Court, Devonport, which she has called



PENGUIN ATTRACTION: Jenny-Lee Hutton shows her unique penguins on a rubbish bin.

Chrysalis, as it displays the work of emerging artists.

Other potters whose work is on display there are Merv Mitchell, Jo Bissett, Karin Crewey, and Fran Pinkard as well as artwork by Kate Weeks, Evelyn Anstey, Margaret Combes, Ben Fettes, Deborah and Peter Conroy, Liz Francis and Tony Bennett.



Jenny-Lee Hutton with her maquette