

The Swartland town of Malmesbury

60km north of Cape Town on the N7

The first expedition in the direction of presentday Malmesbury was undertaken by Jan Wintervogel in 1655, by order of commander Jan van Riebeeck of the Dutch East India Company, three years after the Dutch explorers colonised the Cape.

Previously the area around Malmesbury was inhabited by Khoi San.

The area was soon referred to as "het Zwarteland" (the Black Land), probably because the veld, covered by rhenoster bushes, appeared black at certain times of the year, unlike the greenness of Europe.

When "het Zwartlandkerk" (the Dutch Reformed church) was established in 1745, a mere 24 people were living in the vicinity of the mineral spring, still situated, though only as a small fountain, in the town's centre. The congregation was known as "het Zwartlandkerk" until 1829, when it was proclaimed a town by former governor Sir Lowry Cole and renamed "Malmesbury" in honour of his father-in-law, Sir James Harris, First Earl of Malmesbury in England. On 8 June 1860 the village gained municipal status and was governed by a board of commissioners for nearly 36 years until 1896, when the town council was established.

The town developed rapidly and today is the biggest town in the area, generally known as the "Heart of the Swartland".

Historic Route

private properties to be viewed from street

1. Standard Bank and AM Trust buildings, Church Street

Style: Edwardian
Built: c. 1900

Standing side by side, the Standard Bank and AM Trust buildings are structures characteristic of early 20th century secular architecture. Sturdy and timeless, they incorporate classical elements such as Greek-style pillars and pediments and Roman arches.



2. Pillars surrounding Town Hall, Church Street

Style: Victorian with Baroque detail

Fine late 19th century pillars form the wall encompassing the 20th century town hall. These pillars are all that remain of the old town hall complex, now demolished. The present town hall building was constructed in the International style, which is shared in the Modern Movement.



3. Swartland Dutch Reformed Church, Church Street

Style: Gothic Revival
Built: 1860

The Swartland Dutch Reformed Mother Church is the central edifice of Malmesbury. The glistening white neo-Gothic structure makes an impressive visual impact with its tall steeple and unusual asymmetrical façade.

This congregation was founded in June 1745 by the Rev Francois le Seur of Cape Town. Its first minister was the Rev R Weerman. The original church building was completed in 1751 and later enlarged in 1831, but was still too small. On 30 December 1860 a new church building was inaugurated. About two years later the building collapsed. It was rebuilt within a year and a steeple added in 1864, but this also collapsed in 1877 and had to be rebuilt. The church was enlarged in

1899 by building on side wings. The church organ, with its 1818 pipes and electro-pneumatic action, was inaugurated in 1938. During the term of the Rev WA Landman the building was restored and new teak pews and electricity were installed. The changes were inaugurated on 9 August 1942. By 1964 the congregation had outgrown the mother church and the Swartland North congregation was formed.

The church and churchyard wall were declared a national monument on 6 July 1979. Old gravestones dating as far back as 1830 nestle beneath the Jakaranda trees on the church precinct.



4. "Oulap" residence, 23 Piet Retief Street

Style: Victorian

Built: c. 1899

This Victorian house on the corner of Piet Retief and Rainier Streets, now a private residence, has an interesting history. During the Anglo Boer War (1899 - 1902) it was used as an annex to accommodate the overflow of patients from the town hall, which had been converted into a hospital.

The house was built by Johannes de Greeff for his son. The two original fireplaces and decorative ceilings are interesting features. One of the fig trees in the garden was planted more than a hundred years ago.



5. Trafalgar Centre, corner of Piet Retief and Rainier Streets

Style: Functional

Built: Mid 19th century This old granary, which was owned by former mayor and benefactor of

Malmesbury, PG Nelson, from 1875 to 1956, succeeds in blending into the central historical hub of the town, despite radical renovation.

Trafalgar Centre, as it is now called, houses several businesses and a restaurant.



6. Attorneys' chambers

18 Rainier Street
Style: Victorian
Built: c. 1897



7. Land surveyors' offices

16 Rainier Street
Style: Victorian
Built: c. 1897



8. Old St Thomas Anglican Church, now New Apostolic Mission Church, Voortrekker Street

Style: English Country Gothic Revival

Built: 1859

The history of this national monument can be traced back to 1848, when Bishop Robert Gray visited Malmesbury to investigate the possibility of establishing an Anglican Church. The British government granted sites for a cemetery and a church. Sophia, wife of Bishop Gray, drew up the plans. The building was completed after a year and, on 18 September 1859, Bishop Gray inaugurated the St Thomas Church.

Interesting features are the slate roof and cement finials (crosses). The gable collapsed in 1944. The church was repaired, but the gable was not rebuilt.

In 1977 the congregation moved and the church was sold. It is now used by the New Apostolic Mission.



9. Old Christian Youth Hall, now NG Church office, Voortrekker Street

Style: Edwardian
Built: 1908

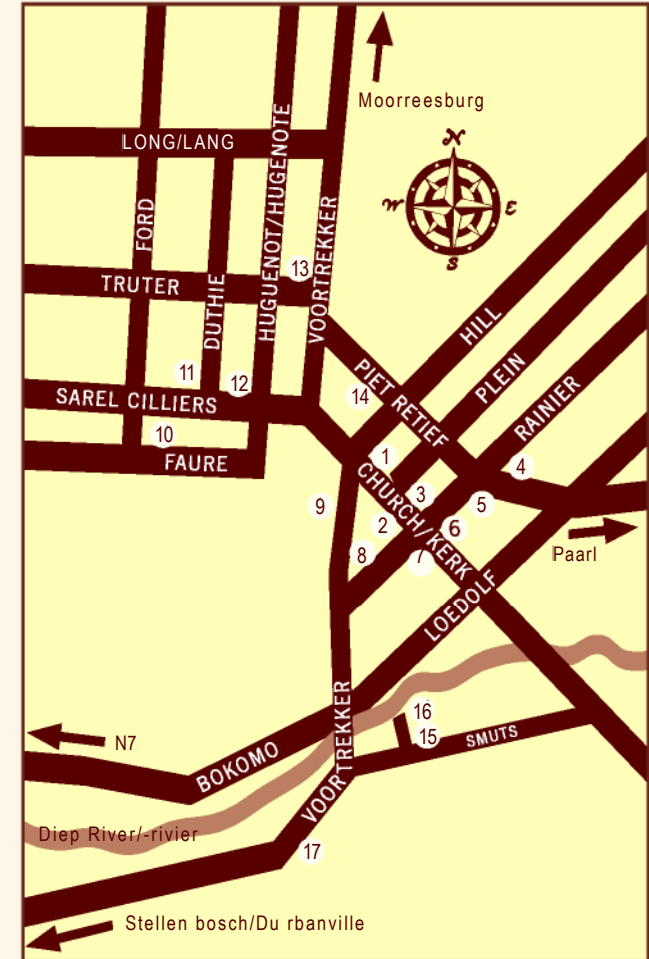
As far back as 1882, a Christian youth association was mentioned in the annals of the Swartland Dutch Reformed Church. Because the youth needed their own hall and a centre for congregational activities was required, a decision was taken to build a hall.

In 1906 the church council approved the plan to erect a hall and in 1908 the building commission reported that the "Christelike Jongelieden Zaal" had been built for £2 304 8s and 6d. Today the building is used as a Dutch Reformed church office.

The highly decorative architecture reflects European influence.



The Malmesbury ROUTE Die Malmesbury ROETE



10. Baron Von Elgg stately home,
14 Faure Street
Style: Victorian Built: 1875
This is the only remaining double storeyed Victorian mansion in Malmesbury. It has been excellently preserved by a series of private owners.



ES Ford built the house for Baron Werdmüller von Elgg of Zurich in 1875. It was however never occupied by the Baron. The cost of construction is said to have been £7 000 and all the building material was ordered from a catalogue and shipped out from England.

Dr Fred Werdmuller bought the house in 1907 and lived there for many years, while Gerrie Thiart, who bought it in 1953, saved the house from demolition, a fate suffered by several other stately Victorian residences scattered about the town. The Von Elgg house was declared a national monument in 1984.

Now a well appointed private home, the house still boasts its original painted, pressed steel ceilings and six marble fireplaces.

11. Town House, 7 Duthie Street
Style: Victorian ised early Cape
Built: c. 1860

This is a particularly attractive example of a communion/church house where farmers stayed over when attending church activities. It was built between 1860 and 1880 in a simple, symmetrical early Cape style with a flat roof sloping towards the back. In 1874, Dr F Biccard bought the property from the "Board of Church wardens" of the Dutch Reformed church. During later renovations the house was given a pitchroof and Victorian detailing. A stable on the south side forms part of the house, hence the quoining on the stoep between the last set of windows.



12. 19th Century streetscape, Huguenot Street
Style: Georgian with 1920s verandah
Built: Late 19th century
The late 19th century cottages of Huguenot Street form a picturesque streetscape, though many are in need of restoration and several have been demolished. Roseknow (pictured) and the Mount Pleasant cottages are notable examples of conservation in this street.



13. Old Police Station, corner of Voortrekker and Truter Streets
Style: Georgian
Built: 1862

This noteworthy Georgian double storey building served as a police station until 1979, whereafter it was used by the defence force commando until 1991. More recently the building accommodated the local newspaper office and other businesses. The interior, with its creaking wooden staircase, is largely intact.



14. Twin Shops, Piet Retief Street
Style: Eclectic
Built: 1880

Originally erected in 1880 as dwellings, these buildings bear the date 1914 on the gables – possibly the date when they were altered for use as commercial premises. The fact that the buildings are twinned enhances their visual impact in the busy town centre.



15. Free Mason Lodge, 2 Prospect Street
Style: Victorian with Classical influence
Built: 1866

The Lodge of St Jan was erected in 1866 according to a design drawn up in Holland. It was built by a certain BJ Croeser, who also built many other buildings in Malmesbury. In 1905 the Lodge was badly damaged by a tornado, but was rebuilt by 1907.



16. Old Jewish Synagogue, now the Malmesbury Museum, 1 Prospect Street
Style: Edwardian
Built: 1911

The foundation stone of the Jewish synagogue of the Ohel Jacob Congregation was laid on 11 November 1911. This exceptional building was designed and built by Max Goldman. At that time the Jewish community comprised about 40 families. Many of these families owned general dealerships, which formed an important part of the economy of the town. By 1920 the Jewish community had grown to about 80 families. However, as the children moved to bigger towns, the Jewish community diminished and eventually disappeared.



An identical synagogue was erected in Piketberg. The synagogue in Malmesbury was bought by Dr Goldman, son of the builder, and presented to the community of Malmesbury on condition that no religious ceremonies were held there. Today the building houses the Malmesbury Museum.

17. Andrew's Hope, Lower Voortrekker Street
Style: Victorian
Built: c. 1880

This magnificent Victorian house, under a giant, spreading wild ficus tree, was built in the 1880s by a young man called Andries Loubser.

Andries, the son of a wealthy local family, was in his late twenties when he completed the house for his bride-to-be, but tragedy struck. Before the marriage could take place, his fiancée died. Andries lived alone at Andrew's Hope and died seven years later – of a broken heart. His grave can be seen in the local cemetery.



Take a trip through the historic hub of Malmesbury and see the town through the eyes of a 19th century visitor. Interspersed among Early Cape buildings dating from about 1850 are structures from later periods, reflecting the rich and varied architectural development of the town over time.

Ry rustig deur die geskiedkundige kern van Malmesbury en besigtig die dorp met die oë van 'n 19de eeuse besoeker. Vroeëkaapse geboue wat dateer van ongeveer 1850 staan plek-plek tussen geboue uit latere tydperke - 'n toonbeeld van die ryke verskeidenheid van argitektoniese ontwikkeling in die dorp deur die jare.

Design by Chris Murphy of Orchard Design
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