

## Malmesbury Tornado and historic landmarks

In 1905 the town of Malmesbury was hit by a tornado. By local accounts it was a short but violent storm, claiming the lives of two youths and three adults. The destruction and damage to many buildings has contributed to the lack of early gabled (only two remain) and thatched houses. The Diep River overflowed its banks and caused floods.



### ***A scene depicting the destructive power of the tornado (Swartland Municipality)***

This is a view of the main road where all the Jewish businesses at the time would have been situated.

The core agricultural activity has been wheat growing, resulting in the area being considered the 'granary of the Cape'. After a boom period in the 1870s there was a period of struggle, ultimately resulting in the forming of BOKOMO and SASKO, still in the heart of the town.

Continuing expansion resulted in the construction of a modern bridge in 1919 to replace an earlier simpler version, followed by a power station, then a dam in the nearby Paardeberg to service the town.

In the picture below we see the new bridge over the river in 1919 with the imposing building of the synagogue on the left hand side.



***The opening of the bridge across the Diep River, built in 1919.  
The imposing building on the left is the synagogue.***

The Dutch Reformed Church is still the visual centre of Malmesbury; although altered from its original form it is believed that elements from that construction still remain. The town once had a sizeable Jewish population but after it declined the synagogue became a museum, hosting exhibits of the town's evolving



history. ***The Old Synagogue, today Malmesbury Museum, and alongside the Masonic Hall, utilised as a church.***



***The dominant visual feature still in Malmesbury, the Dutch Reformed Church, still as it would have appeared late 19th century***

*Excerpts from a presentation delivered by Chris Murphy at the Malmesbury Museum on 12 November 2019. Chris was a member and subsequent chair of the Swartland Heritage Foundation for many years. He has also completed the Urban and Architectural Conservation course at UCT. At present he is the chair of the West Coast Museum Forum.*

*Reference: [Op 'n reis deur Malmesbury in tyd](#)*