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/\ The location of Maldon

The small town of Maldon, at the foot of mount Tarrangower, is located in Victoria, about 130 km north-west of Melbourne.



The nearest large town is Castlemaine. To get there one can go by car on "M" and "A" roads or use the V-Line railway connection.

/\ Maldon in early time

The region around today's Maldon was thinly inhabited by some Aborigines, such as the "Jajuwurrong" tribe. However, many Aborigines were dying from European diseases, such as small pox, even before settlers arrived at the valleys in the vicinity of mount Tarrangower. The first British settlers arrived after Thomas Mitchell's Victorian expedition stayed there in 1836. These were pastoralists. Then sheep courses were established in the area.



Over the next 10 to 15 years, a small village developed, with a few hundred residents, and eventually some shops were established as well. Animal farming was dominant; crop farming was tried to a small degree.



Nevertheless, this village was obviously smaller than all the other towns in northern Victoria.

^ The gold-rush

Yet this changed immensely when gold mines were detected in Victoria. In January 1851 the first catch was disclosed, for Clunes (north of Ballarat). In July 1851 Forest Creek diggings followed, near present-day Castlemaine, at that time claimed to be the richest shallow alluvial goldfield in the world. In 1852, many further gold discoveries followed, including Ballarat, Beechworth, Bendigo, Chiltern, Walhalla.

In December 1853, gold was noticed at Cairn Curran (the name of one of the sheep runs), later labelled "Tarrangower", and this became a part of the Victorian "gold rush". The location immediately attracted an immense number of people. After a few weeks about 3000 miners had arrived at the diggings. Beside English and Scottish men, there were large numbers of Germans, Italians, Chinese and Americans.

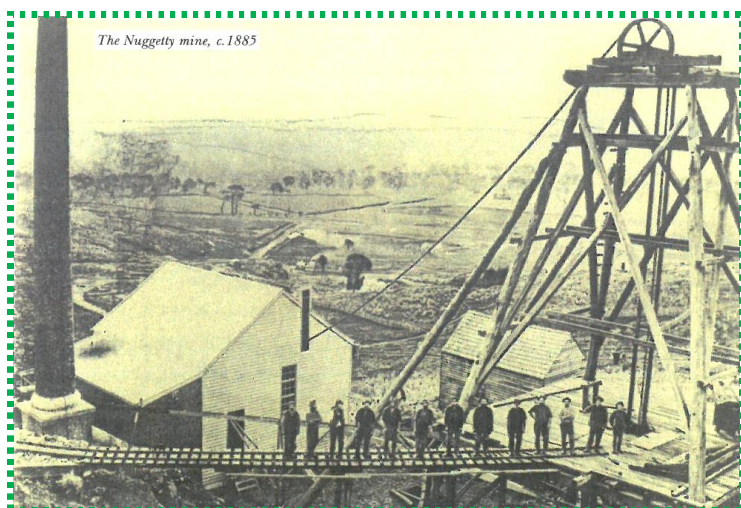
In the beginning the miners used very simple tools, yet over time much stronger equipment became available so that everything from plain holes to big tunnels could be set up.

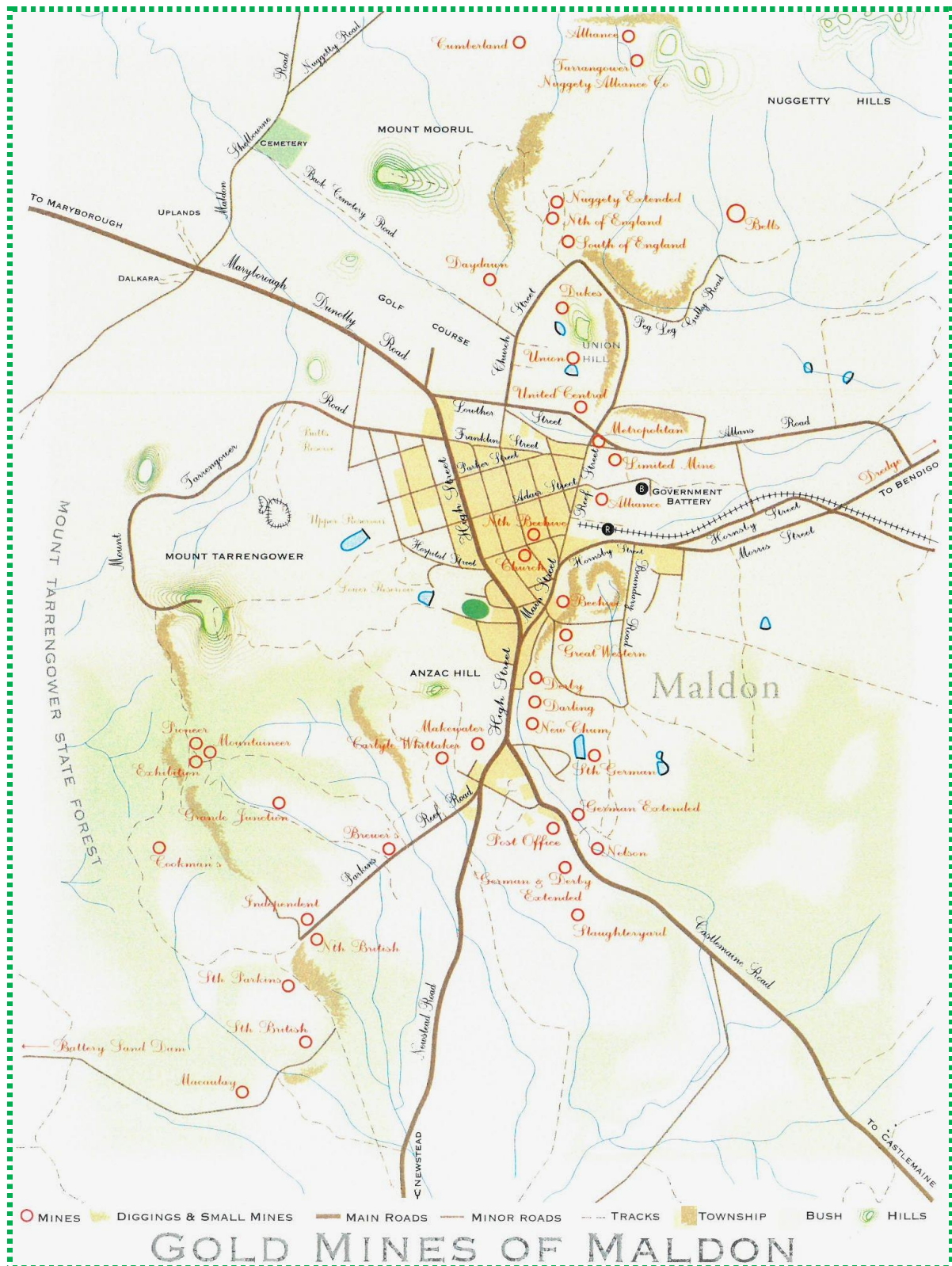




In 1856 the Victorian government arranged for the settlement to become a town, which was named Maldon. A post office had already been installed in 1854.

Gold digging flourished for about 30 years, and was soon taken over by companies which then mounted mighty installations. Most of them did not survive, yet many old - very wrecked and very rusty - bits & pieces can be seen in and around Maldon.

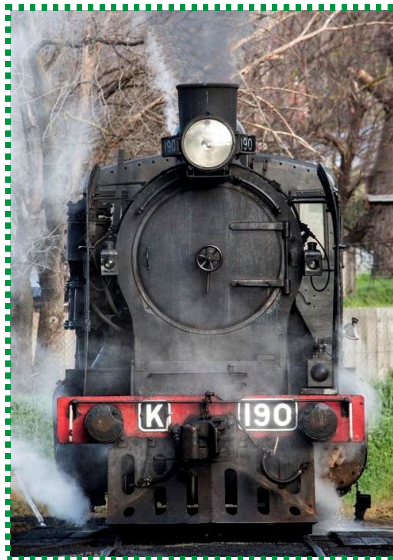




About 40 locations have been identified as former mines. From 1860 to 1870 Maldon was the 8th-largest town in Victoria, with about 3500 regular residents and at least 6000 miners at the diggings.

/\ The railway to Maldon

Given the then-importance of Maldon, a railway line Castlemaine-Maldon was build and opened in 1884, it is 17 km long.



For a while four trains per day were running, either for transporting goods, or for passengers.





The steam locomotives are all unique historic engines; some are 'on loan' from elsewhere.

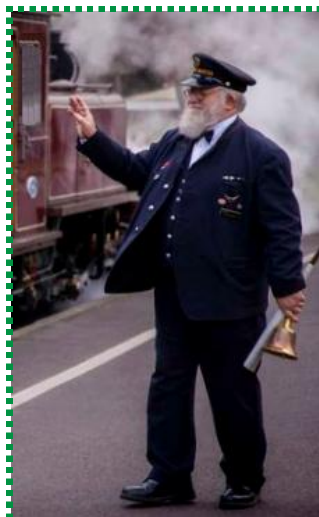
On hot summer days diesel locomotives replace them, in order to avoid that steam engines may contribute to the bushfire risk.

The variety of second class and first class carriages include a "salon" wagon - - and this one even has a bar!



Given that steam locomotives are completely out of use within current railway systems, to hear, and to see, the 'steam cloud' produced by these puffing monsters is true fun.

Amusingly, the officials at the railway station and in the train all wore traditional dresses and used historic devices.



Yet when gold-mining in Maldon more or less ended, the line became useless. Passenger services were stopped in World War II. Goods trains operated until 1970. In 1976 the line was closed completely.

This was of course disliked, and there was a strong community reaction in Maldon and also in Castlemaine. Soon the "Castlemaine and Maldon Railway Preservation Society" was founded. The aim was to reopen the line as tourist railway.

While Maldon station was intact and could be used as basis for their operations, there were many serious problems, such as, the track needed substantial repairs, and there was quite a lack of rolling stock.

For 10 years a lot of volunteers worked hard to get a locomotive and some carriages ready. In 1986, trains could operate on a one kilometre intact track out of Maldon. This enterprise is now called the "Victorian Goldfields Railway ~ VGR".

Using the support from the local, state and federal governments, all damaged tracks could be repaired, signposting modernized, and further carriages prepared.

Since 2005, VGR operates fully, Maldon-Castlemaine and Castlemaine-Maldon, with several trains each Wednesday, Sunday and on most public holidays. The travel time is around 45 minutes.

Personal remark:

On December 31 2017, the last day of the year, I indeed travelled from Castlemaine to Maldon with the Victorian Goldfields Railway - of course first class, and of course in the "salon" carriage. And yes, I certainly enjoyed it!

^ Remains of the gold chase era

Not much is left of the mining facilities, certainly not within the town. From the once largest North British Mine only some minor ruins can be found.



Larger machinery fragments are rusting in the nearby forests and some waterways or ponds.

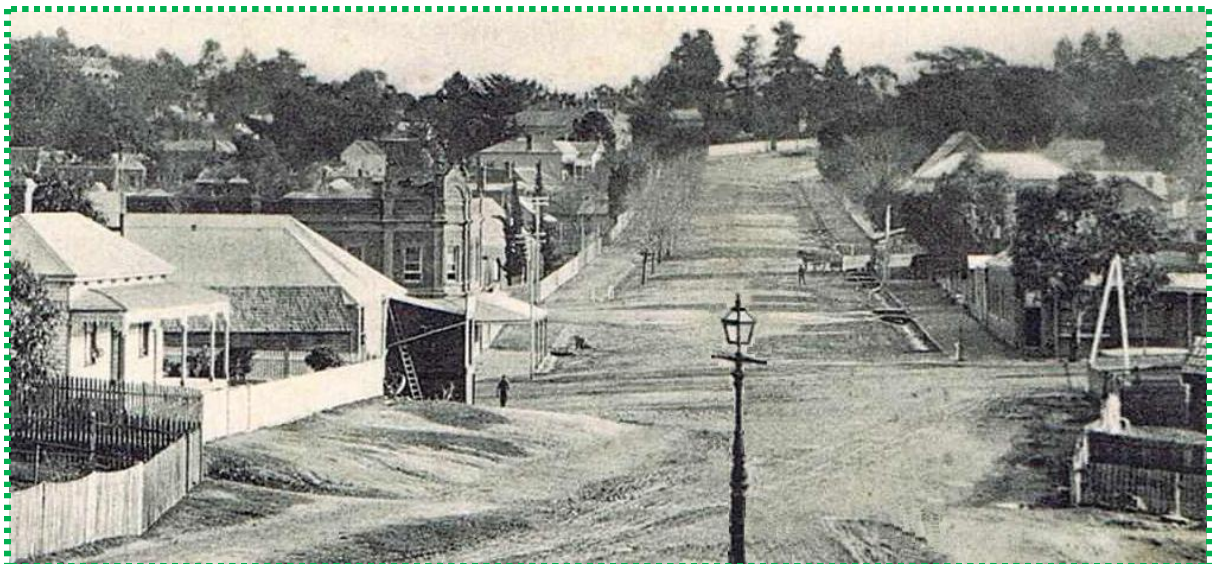


Only the high tower of the long-dead Beehive Mine still stands - now it's an icon of Maldon!



^ Maldon's revival

When Maldon's period as a flourishing gold town came to an end, around 1890, most people moved elsewhere and eventually just a few hundred residents were left, dead mines seemed to mean dead town.



For decades of years Maldon was just a tiny town, and almost nothing was happening there.

Yet at last things changed - people realized the uniqueness of this historic township. In 1966 the National Trust of Victoria declared Maldon to be "Australia's first notable town" and pointed out: *"It displays overall historical and architectural importance, particularly in its gold town buildings. The significance lies in the variety of building styles...Maldon is largely*

unchanged since the 1850s, and has attracted considerable interest from tourists for its 19th-century atmosphere."

Today the population of Maldon is ~1400. The town has 1 food store, 1 bakery, 1 butcher, 5 cafes, 1 book store, 1 bank, 1 patrol station, 1 car service, 2 hotels, and shops for vintage pieces, antiques and art. Almost all of these facilities are located in historic buildings.



Maldon is nowadays regularly visited by travellers, and has also become a retreat for artists and writers.

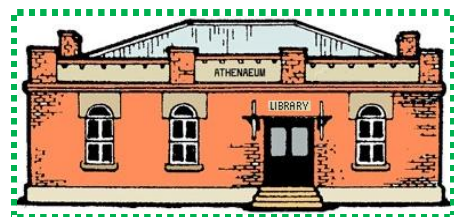
Personal remark:

On December 31 2017, after arriving in Maldon, I booked a room in the historic "Hotel Maldon" for 2 days. And then I explored the whole town, not only the main streets with their shops, but, on January 1, also the outer areas with all sorts of old (mostly) and new (rarely) residences.



^ Variety of historic buildings

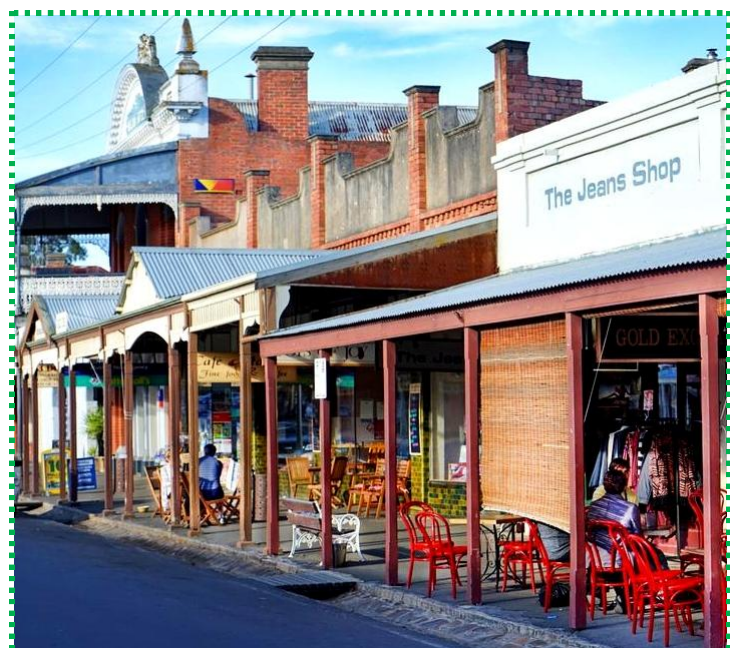
Firstly, regarding the usual 'officialized' buildings, such as townhall, schools, hospital, library, post office, churches, they are still there, almost all built in Maldon's prime time. The hospital, completed around 1869, is by far the largest facility in Maldon.

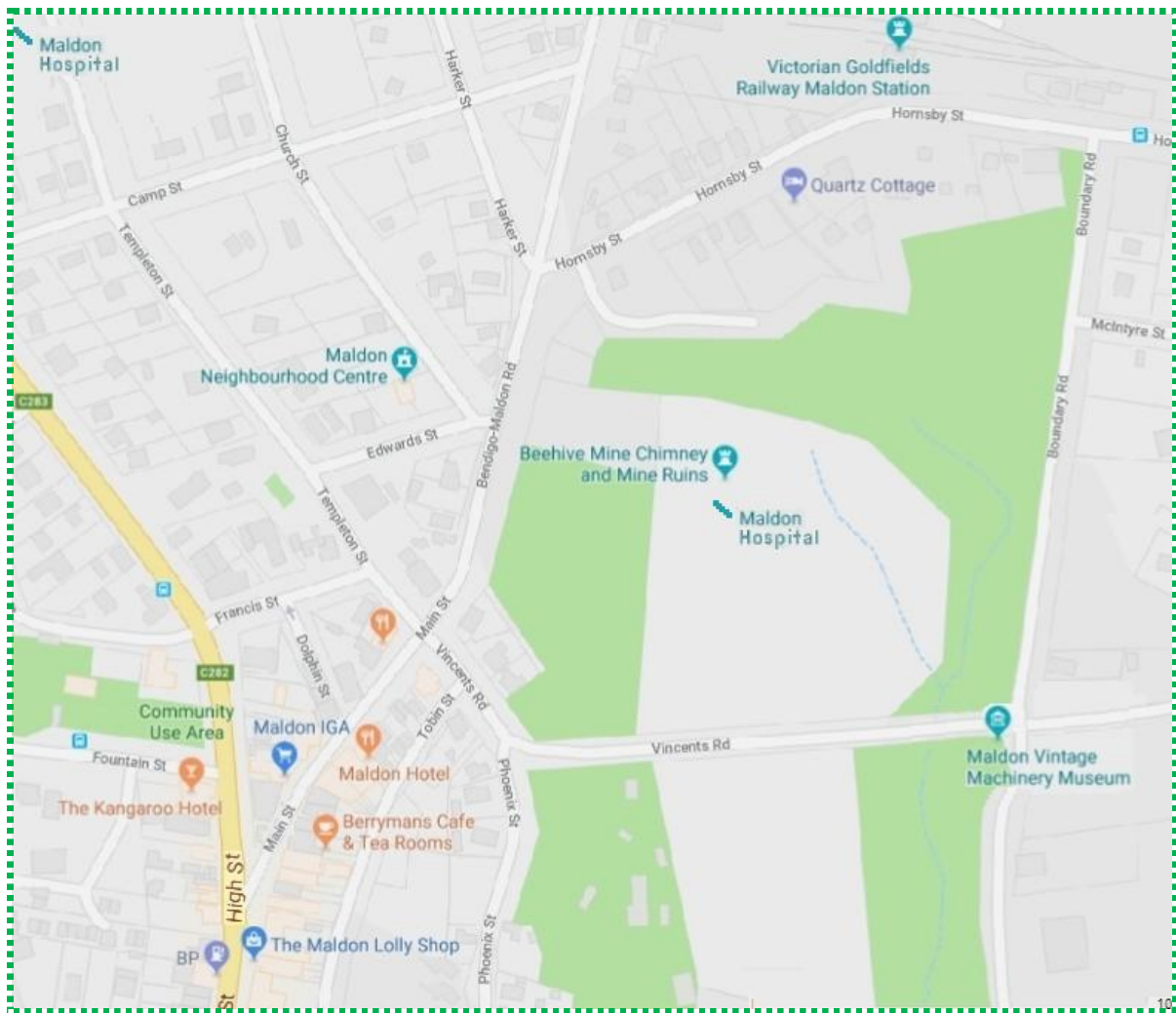


Secondly, in Maldon's central streets, Main Street and High Street, almost all buildings were already erected in the 19th century, and that's where nowadays most of the shops, bistros and hotels are - see the town map further below.

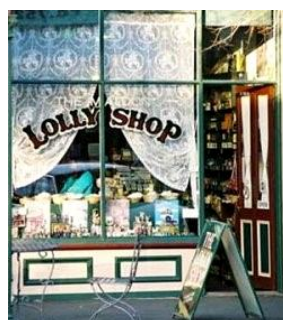


A lot of shops still show an old, long outdated, name on the facade, not in line what's actually traded in our time.





By the way, it turned out that this cute little shop has not just lollies - - there are all sorts of weird 'models' of people, of cars, of sweets on offer!



Thirdly, a large variety of private residences can be seen in Maldon, and very many go back to the "golden epoch".

It began with very simple houses, set up by miners when they had gained their first revenue.



Once miners got rich, and once wealthy business people settled in Maldon, the benchmarks clearly went up.

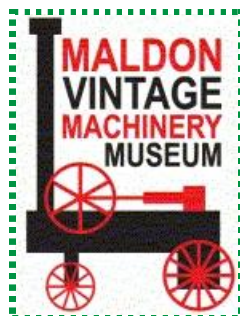


And finally, grand villas became almost a 'must', as this one here.

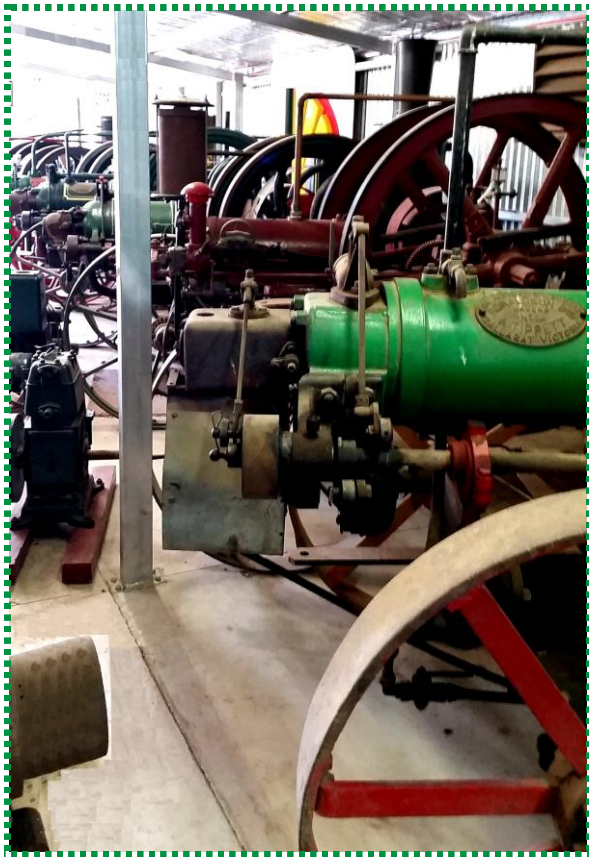


/\ Museum of Technology

Maldon has two museums, the "Maldon Museum & Archives" (located in the old Shire Hall, now extended) and the "Maldon Vintage Machinery Museum" (which is located east of the city center).

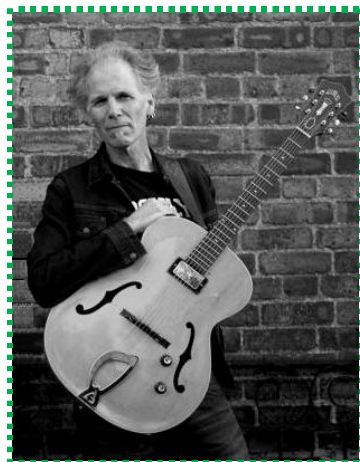


This one has an enormous collection of stationary engines, any kind of mining machinery, farming implements, fire pumps and so on.



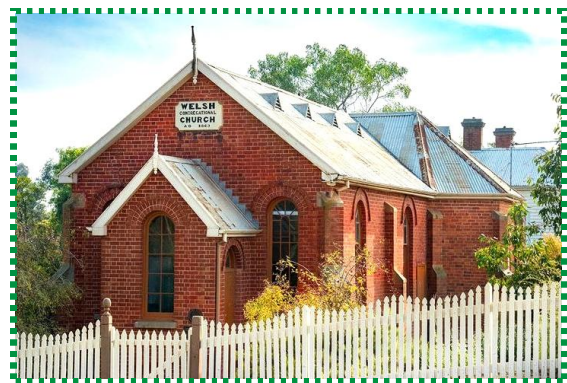
Personal remark:

On December 31 2017 the bistro within the museum had organized a life music night, 20:00-24:00. I went there, enjoyed the two bands very much, especially the "Sons of the Blues", and conversed with them.



^ Churches & cemeteries

From 1855 onwards, within a decade eight churches were built. The Anglican Holy Trinity church was the most important one, and the only one in Maldon to get a pipe organ. The largest building is the United Church.



Within its Golden Age, Maldon also needed a large cemetery. This was established north-west of the town, about 2 km away. It contains graves for people from many countries, and has Chinese features as well.



^ The distinctiveness of Maldon

What makes Maldon distinctive? Well, it is very vivid history, not just a museum. And going there starts already accordingly, when using the historic train.



True, this town, nowadays a very small one, does not contain 'grand' buildings, rather normal ordinary ones. In its prime time, as a rich gold 'metropolis', it tried repeatedly to get a great townhall (like the grand plan of 1900), yet that was never realized.



In a way, that Maldon after the brief golden epoch did not pass away, that it lived on as a modest country town, that it wasn't overrun by wild modernization waves, made it feasible to maintain its countenance as an honest history place.

One example for this long-term vividness is hard to believe - Maldon has its own newspaper, the "Tarrangower Times", which was first published in 1858, is still alive, and thus the oldest continuously published newspaper in Victoria.



What visitors see in Maldon is genuine and authentic, and it is not set up by a clever~cool marketing company. Thus visiting Maldon provides a plain yet faithful picture of how the 'Golden Age' has shaped so many towns in Australia.

