



TOWER OF HERCULES

20th Century alterations

In the late decades of the 19th centuries and the early ones of the 20th century improvements to the lighting system continued to keep abreast of technical developments. Thus, the Sautter lamp was replaced by a new one made by the company Létourneau so that the light was stronger and visible in the dark, stormy nights of the Atlantic.

Aside from these technical considerations, the Tower, following Giannini's restoration, began to be popular and appreciated. And this was particularly so in the case of Galicians who have a long tradition as seamen. Since its inception, it was closely linked to this tempestuous sea that batters its coasts and takes its seamen away. In this context, the lighthouse is the light that guides ships on their way and into port, it is the image of return, of a happy day's run and it is for all these reasons that it turned into a symbol, an icon that became part of the collective memory of our society. That is why when in late 19th century and early 20th century, a time when Galician people emigrated in search of employment and better opportunities across the Atlantic all over Latin America, they will take with them the image of the Tower of Hercules which lights powerfully from across the oceans thanks to the articles published by Galicians in the magazines of emigration. There is not one of them between 1890 and 1960 that fails to include an article on the Tower, where homesickness and nostalgia become apparent.

In the context of this new appreciation of the Tower, local scholars will seek to improve the condition of the monument and the General Directorate for Public Works, which owns the building, will take into account their opinions, which will be channelled through the local office. As a result of this collaboration in 1902, engineer Salvador López Miño decided to make improvements on the inside of the Tower. He began by removing the false ceilings and the wallpapers so that the original faces were visible again. Besides, masonry was jointed with concrete and some elements in "poor taste" were removed such as the wooden banister, which was replaced by a stone one. This improvement could not repair the joints of all four facades due to the high cost of scaffolding.

In 1926, the Cooperativa Eléctrica Coruñesa makes an important work of underground electrification to provide the Tower with electrical supply and adapt the lamp to the new lighting system, which from now on it would reach 32 miles.

This physical and intellectual appreciation of the Tower led to its declaration of Historical-Artistic Monument on the 3rd day of June 1931, along with other outstanding buildings in the city.

As far as the surroundings of the Tower is concerned, between 1954 and 1956 new houses for lighthouse keepers were built that replaced the rambling house erected in 1861, which has not survived either. The houses were built on the southeast of the lighthouse as it is most protected area, sheltered from north-western storms. The building was connected to the platform without jutting out over it, which minimised its visual impact. Each house had a lounge, a bathroom, a dining room, kitchen and a pantry on the ground floor and the bedrooms and a bathroom on the first floor. It was also at this time that the tunnel communicating the houses with the lighthouse through the platform was built. This damaged the Roman time foundations.

On 12th May 1976 the Tower and the city of A Coruña experienced one of the most dramatic events in recent history, the accident of oil tanker Urquiola, which ran aground on the pointy rocks of the northern entry channel of the port and sank after spilling part of the 120,000 tons of crude oil, resulting in one of the most serious natural disasters suffered by Galician rias. The Tower was a mute spectator to the huge plume of smoke that engulfed the city for hours, as if it were a thick fog. Pollution spread across the rias of the Gulf of Artabro, destroying all marine cultivations and flooding the beaches with the feared black smear.

In March 1986, MP and writer María Victoria Fernández-España, with the support of the Centro Gallego de Madrid, requested for the first time that the Tower of Hercules were listed as a World Heritage Site. This idea was taken up and boosted again in 1989.

In 1988, the Ministry of Public Works, as the owner of the lighthouse by virtue of its use as aid to navigation, decided to close the lighthouse to visits due to its deplorable condition and signed an agreement with the City Council to restore it.

On the occasion of the bicentennial of the rebuilding of the Tower of Hercules (1790-1990), the Spanish Ministry of Public Works and Urbanism and the City Council of A Coruña signed an agreement aimed at planning a set of measures to enhance





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and give visibility to the monument. In 1990, the Ministry put out to tender a technical assistance for the writing of a restoration project for the Tower and its surroundings.

The project was awarded to an interdisciplinary team led by architect Pablo Latorre González-Moro. Also members of the team were architect Leandro Cámara, who was in charge of the study of bronze carpentry: restorer and chemist José M. Cabrera, who focussed on the analysis of mortars; Germán Roibás, who worked on photogrammetry and archaeologist Luis Caballero Zoreda, who was in charge of the archaeological study and who had the full collaboration of archaeologist Bello Diéguez of the Department of Culture of the City Council of A Coruña, and who made excavations on the surrounding area and contributed a wealth of historical data regarding the Tower of Hercules.

Eduardo Toba, chief engineer of the Galician Coast Demarcation Department supervised the work of these professionals.

It was a very ambitious project and an exemplary, interdisciplinary work that made it possible to diagnose the lighthouse and study its pathologies as well as to improve the electrical system, replace the metallic carpentry of the windows with safety glass and replace iron elements with bronze ones.

The commemoration plaques of the 18th century refurbishment, which were on the gates of the Tower, were also restored. Renowned Galician sculptor Francisco Leiro was entrusted with the task of making gates decorated with relieves making reference to the history and legends around this monument.

It was also then when the platform of the Tower was cleared. The buildings, such as the house of the tower keepers, which spoil the image of the monument, were removed. At the same time, excavations were conducted on a wide area at the foot of the Tower. The archaeological excavation was made by Bello Diéguez in two stages in 1990 and 1991. The relevance of the finds led to the musealization of the remains so that they could be seen and appreciated by those visiting the Tower.

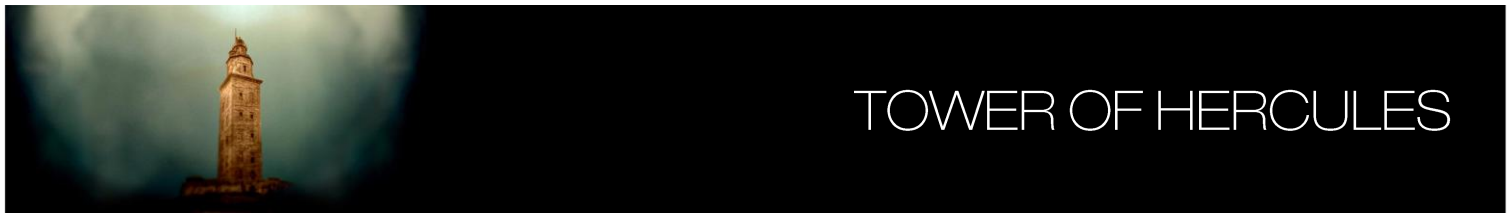
On the second stage of the project, a small museum building was built on the platform in the shape of a bank. This building leads into the excavation and gives access to the lighthouse through an old tunnel, dug in 1956 so that lighthouse keepers could have direct access to the Tower from their homes.

This same project included the urban planning of the immediate surroundings of the Tower. This led to the construction of a car park, sign systems, a roundabout to mark off area of the tower from the rest; the paving and lighting of the pedestrian area to keep road traffic away from the monument and a study of the urban planning of the nearby area. It also envisaged the creation of an archaeological park at the peninsula of the Tower, but this idea was finally ruled out. Instead, an open-air museum and a green area for the leisure were made as A Coruña was short of this kind of facilities. In parallel, as so as to contribute to making the Tower a better known monument, all sources and documents that were in any manner connected to the monument were researched and compiled. This work resulted in an exhibition and the publishing of the catalogue *Torre y Ciudad*, co-coordinated by archaeologist J. M. Bello Diéguez and art historian A. Vigo Trasancos. Besides, the translations into Spanish of the works of Hutter and Hauschild were published and Instituto José Cornide de Estudios Locales published an extensive compilation of sources on the Tower from the Middle Ages to the present.

Restoration works had just been completed and everything seemed ready to re-open the Tower of Hercules to visitors. It was 3 December 1992. On that stormy morning oil tanker Aegean Sea run aground on the rock of the inlet formed by the peninsulas of Punta Eiras and Punta Herminia. In other words, at the foot of the Tower. Disaster loomed again over the city when the oil tanker was pushed by the violent waves of the Atlantic against the cliffs. Oil tanks began to spill fuel and the hull broke. For the second time, a huge plume of thick smoke engulfed the Tower and the city. And the rias of the Gulf of Artrabo were again covered in a tide of black death and despair. As a consequence of the smoke and ashes, the Tower underwent a profound cleaning so that stone could recover its characteristic golden hue that had been covered by soot. And thus it faced the turning of the century and the start of a new era.

In this early years of the century, work on the improvement of the lighthouse and the surrounding area continued by implementing projects promoted by the City Council, the Xunta de Galicia and the Port Authority. All the governments that have powers on this asset have provided a model of collaboration when it comes to implementing improvements.





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Between 2007 and 2009, the Port Authority financed a number of restoration and improvement projects aimed at solving some problems detected in the monument during the study conducted by the technicians of the Department of Culture and Sports of the Xunta de Galicia on the occasion of the writing of the report to be included in the application to include the Tower in the UNESCO's World Heritage List. Led by the architectural studio of Juan M. Doce Porto and Dulcemaría Trigo Cousillas problems such as damp and condensation caused by bronze carpentry were solved, the washrooms were redistributed and improvements were made to the archaeological area to grant access to people with reduced mobility. Works also included the improving the lighting at the excavation site and of the inner chambers and the restoration of the outer facades, although it was necessary to scaffold the Tower in the winter and the spring of 2009.

As far as the City Council of A Coruña, it implemented to projects that were very necessary for the Tower. The construction of a small Visitors Reception Centre at the car park at the foot of the monument where visitors will be received and tickets sold. This facility will solve an unattended demand of the Tower since 1990.

The second project was the improvement of the musealization of the archaeological site with new information boards consisting of texts and images that show visitors the most important episodes of the history of the lighthouse.

In very few months, the Tower will also have an Information Centre which will be built next to the Visitor's Welcome Centre. The inner chambers and the so-called Giannini Room will be musealized. With these projects we hope that the Tower, as well as being the best vantage point over the Atlantic, is perceived by visitors as an exceptional lighthouse as it is the only one that after 2000 years continues to guide ships sailing these very dangerous, oceanic waters.