THE RESTORATION OF THE SEGOVIA MINT


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INTRODUCTION

One year after the conclusion of the restoration work on the Segovia Mint, the Association has prepared this graphic report about aspects of the reconstruction which, in our opinion, are unacceptable. The restoration of such an important Heritage site deserves a technical and scientific critique, which we begin in this report with simple before and after photos. We intend to continue investigating the “Reconstruction Phase” of the project.

We have already stated that 99% of the restoration work is acceptable and many aspects are indeed commendable. Nevertheless there remains 1%* which is technically, scientifically and historically incorrect, unacceptable and needs to be modified. These are aspects which are of great technical and historical importance regarding the visual interpretation of this historic factory. They distort, impede and obstruct the authentic image of the Industrial Monument which visitors should receive.

In our opinion, due to the exceptional importance of this unique monument, the three administrations which financed the work should review the documents used by the Supervising Commission and the municipal architects which approved the conclusion and receipt of the project.

*Calculated according to estimated cost of modifications suggested in this report (100,000 euro) and the total cost of the restoration project (10 million).

These papers should also be made available to other institutions such as –UNESCO, ICOMOS, EUROPA NOSTRA, TICCIH, ICOHTEC, HISPANIA NOSTRA, TERRITORIAL HERITAGE COMMISSION, etc.- so they can study and freely comment on the problematic aspects which we mention pertaining to this project which is still awaiting a logical critique.

The origin or causes of what we consider deficiencies in the restoration work could be various. In part they could be due to lack of technical and scientific knowledge by the assessment team which carried out the “Reconstruction Phase” of the project, the simple lack of aesthetic criteria by the contractor or architects, the fact that the mayor insisted on formally receiving the finished project immediately prior to municipal elections, or that the contractor was entering bankruptcy during the final months of the reconstruction.

We have opted for the simplicity and the impact of an eminently graphic report, hoping that it will be able to transmit the desired message and inspire continued investigation towards the correction of these problems.

Fire walls are an important characteristic of industrial plants. During the Reconstruction Phase, several new fire walls were “invented” and placed where they had never before existed and thus serve no real purpose except as decoration. These new, false fire walls, gravely affect the interpretation of the original fire walls in their historic location and which have been properly restored.

**FIRE WALLS**

**FALSIFIED ELEMENTS**

Historic fire wall before restoration.

A possible solution (in PhotoShop).
HYDRAULIC SYSTEM

The planned configuration of the Mint’s hydraulic system was substantially modified during the Reconstruction Phase, after the restoration had already begun. Instead of rebuilding the canal designed by the famous Juan de Herrera, which was the marvel of the plant during its period of splendour 1584-1771, with the wood donated for this cause by National Heritage, the 18th century canal was left in place and the waterwheels were mounted on the OTHER (the wrong) side of the canal. This configuration did not exist at the Segovia Mint at any point in its history and is a grave falsification of one of the most important aspects of the industrial plant, transmitting a completely erroneous scientific and technical message which must be corrected. No waterwheel powered industrial plant anywhere ever had a configuration like this. It is extremely important that this error be corrected, by simply building what was originally planned.

This plan of the Cuenca Mint’s canal (a copy of Segovia’s) shows that the first three waterwheels are located directly beside the wall of the building, not on the other side of the canal as in the above photo.

The historic wall or support pier for the original wooden canal and ends of the waterwheel axles (arrows) was demolished during the reconstruction.
The so called charcoal hatch door on the upper patio was eliminated during the Reconstruction Phase of the project. This important element of industrial archaeology would have been easy to save and would have made an interesting part of the interpretation of the factory.

The historic drainage cover carved from a single piece of granite, which was located immediately to the left of the main entrance, has also disappeared during the Reconstruction Phase of the project. Although the drainage conduit itself has been closed off, this historic cover should have been left in place. Good industrial archaeology is respectful of original details of the monumental factory.
Beautiful wrought iron balconies were eliminated in the Reconstruction Phase. These characteristic elements of Castilian architecture were located on the upper patio level (above) and on Coin Street (left).

**Elements which have vanished**

Historic wrought iron gates were replaced in the Reconstruction Phase for new cheap versions made of sheet metal which have nothing to do with the factory’s time period.
The impressive rafters in the upper patio building were made from hand hewn wood and fastened together with wooden pegs. They were scheduled to be disassembled, cleaned, restored and remounted in their original location. Unfortunately, however, they all have disappeared in the Reconstruction Phase of the project and have been replaced by cheap modern carpentry. They were in a magnificent state of conservation and certainly were not taken to the dump. Although this exploitation currently has no remedy, it would be of interest to find the whereabouts of this historic wooden structure in order to reclaim a few sample rafters which could be displayed to show the original construction techniques used at the Mint. Industrial archaeology attempts to conserve original elements of the factory, and when this is not possible, at least to retain samples for display.
The inscriptions on the facade of an industrial building are one of its most important characteristics. They should be respected and restored by the archaeologist as vital testimony of the departamentalization of the modern plant, a new mentality typical of the Industrial Revolution 200 years later, but which began precisely at this Mint.

Not only were the inscriptions on the Mint’s walls not protected during the construction work; as of today, they still have not been restored, are quickly fading, and at the point of disappearing.
The chimneys of the foundry building have been incorrectly interpreted in their finished aspect.

**FOUNDRY CHIMNEYS**

**INCORRECTLY INTERPRETED ELEMENTS**

Their covering with slate during the Reconstruction Phase of the project was apparently a last minute decision made for decorative purposes, since they were correctly finished for nearly one year before the slate was added. This style never existed on chimneys of this building or any other historic industrial factory and needs to be corrected.

**HISTORIC RESEMBLANCE**

**NEW ASPECT**
The fishing pavilion was poorly interpreted in the Reconstruction Phase of the project. The photo taken of the Mint by Laurent in 1870 was evidently ignored. Instead of a sharp angled slate roof, topped with a decorative ornament, a flatter angled tile roof with no ornament was built. This error should be corrected.
UPPER PATIO SURFACE

The upper patio was only partially paved with granite slabs, an incomplete surfacing which significantly encumbers its use in large open air events such as concerts. A puzzle of wooden plank walkways and wood chip filled areas— which has already caused several people to trip and fall— makes people uncomfortable and unable to freely move about. The area available for people seated in chairs is cut in half. The surface of this great patio area needs to be modified in order to provide comfort as well as safety for spectators in large events. Indeed, these wooden plank walkways never existed at the Mint, and constitute an artificial and unnecessary distortion of the historic industrial plant.

NEW ADDITIONS WHICH OBSTRUCT

LAMPPPOSTS

The monumental entrance to the Mint, and typical postcard view, has suffered an aggressive attack by the inconvenient placing of two new modernistic lampposts. These ridiculous additions will now appear in the snapshots which tourists shoot in front of the Mint. These elements obstruct, are unnecessary, and should be eliminated as soon as possible.
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Murray is the author of the “Basic Museum Project” (“Project Phase” in this report) for the Segovia Mint, via contract with Segovia City Hall in 2004, which was used by the architects as the basis for the restoration of the Mint. Doctor of History from the University of Valladolid, with dissertation titled “The Royal Segovia Mint, Heritage and Industry”, Murray has written over one hundred publications about the Segovia Mint. In 2009 he was awarded the grand prize for “European Union Cultural Heritage / Europa Nostra”.

The Royal Segovia Mint (1583) is the oldest and most complete industrial manufacturing plant built for mechanized production still standing in the world today. Considered the fourth monument of Segovia in importance, it is located in a unique, world-class Heritage setting which obligates maximum care and attention in all types of interventions.

Of maximum importance should be respect for authenticity as well as technical, scientific and historical characteristics of original elements. False or invented elements which only hinder the correct interpretation of the monument should be rejected. The true legacy of the Segovia Mint we leave for future generations demands corrections be made.