



LA TORRE

History of the former parish church of San Miguel
Arcángel

BRIEF SUMMARY

A look into La Torre's history, currently a Centro Cultural, from its beginnings to the present time, going through all its renovations

Oficina de Turismo del Ayuntamiento de
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LA TORRE

The old parish church of San Miguel Arcángel, commonly known as “La Torre” (The Tower), is on the highest point of a hill around which Guadarrama’s life revolved for many centuries. Its course runs parallel with the history of the town, of probable roman origins, which would later serve the interests of muslim conquerors, always linked, in these first centuries of its history, to a possible defensive function as a result of its unbeatable placement at a crossroads.

Origins

Although we’re not certain of it, there’s authors that suggest that it started as a mosque, built on top of some other preexisting structure, that the christians would later use to build a church.

It’s thought that the orientation of the building (90° East) was decided during one of the days devoted to San Miguel (saint Michael) of the 12th or 13th Century, a moment of conflict against islam.

The header belongs to a first building phase, from the repopulation times judging by the mudéjar style apse. Made out of masonry, an arrow slit window can be seen on the exterior wall, a window that’s now filled, which suggests that this was a buliding that served both liturgical and defensive purposes. The inside, made of brick and plaster, leaves no doubt that it was made by workers who either were form muslim origin or had been taught by them, as the remains of an aleya (a verse of the Coran praising God) has been found on the plaster, a common occurence that highlights the cohabitation of both cultures in the Iberian Peninsula.

A second building phase must have happened when Guadarrama was declared a Town by Ferdinand the Catholic, at the start of the 15th Century, which is when the tower was built, with a mix of the medieval and romanic styles, proved by the exterior masonry walls and decorative balls, imitating the church’s tower of Collado Mediano, which was also built during this time. From this phase is also the archway that leads into the main space, made out of granite voussoirs¹.

From the 18th century was a stone cross that used to be in front of the main gate on the epistle’s side, in which pedestal was carved the year 1700 along with some unreadable text.

It is also known that in 1724 the parish priest asked for permission to reapply plaster to the inside walls, open a window in the sacristy, and move the door to it as to make space for a new altarpiece. Another date, this time 1728, can be seen on the edge of this new door. Also, it has been written down in the records of the time that inbetween 1772 and

¹ Carrasco Vázquez, J. [15/06/2023](#)

1774 the roof of the tower had to be repaired due to its ruined state, a repair that must have been shoddily done, as the roof had to be fixed again in 1795.²

After the Spanish Independence War

Because of the French Invasion of 1808 the parish church of San Miguel suffered, as the rest of the town, great damage. In fact, it was used as a barrack by a troop of 150 men, who also made it into a horse stable and a butchery.

After the end of the Spanish Independence War, which ended in the area around the spring of 1813 when the remains of the French Army came through town while withdrawing, Guadarrama was a ruined, almost empty town. The rebuilding of the church was a matter that sprung its recently returned inhabitants into action, as they asked for the intervention of the King in October of 1817.

Despite the King's willingness to help, the archbishop of Toledo didn't send anyone until seven years later, when, in 1824, Leonardo Clemente arrived, a member of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando and architect of the archdiocese. After an inspection he concluded that it'd be cheaper to turn the old flour and grain storage building (the Panera Real) into a new church, as it'd only need a new roof and bulrush, instead of rebuilding the original parish church, as its ruined state and uphill location only made it worthy of fixing the tower, taking the roof out and turning it into a graveyard. This solution was not put into effect, as the Panera (also known as Pósito) was not owned by the town of Guadarrama but by the Town of Madrid.

As his idea was not viable, the architect decided to instead fix the tower, take down the wall that was blocking the northern door, scrape and whiten the walls with two layers of plaster and glue, rebuild the tribune and its fencing, refloor the entire church, covering the tombs that had been left open, build a new main altar with three steps leading to it, make a new tabernacle, and place a new altar with a single step on each of the side wings. It was also necessary to get new altarpieces of saint Michael, saint Francis and saint Anthony, as the previous ones were destroyed.

The renovation work was assigned to a Toledan contractor called Clemente Acevedo, who was given a budget of 43.460 reales. The rebuilding started during February 1825 and were finished by June 20th. On July 8th the architect certified the satisfactory results of the works.³

The parish church was in use during the biggest part of the 19th Century, until, in spite of all this renovations, it became ruined again. The church activities were moved to the town hall, then to a barn –which caught fire– and lastly to the arcades of the Casa Consistorial. It was then decided to rebuild the original church, which was done thanks

² Carrasco Vázquez, J. [09/08/2023](#)

³ Carrasco Vázquez, J. (2008) 24-26

to the tenacity of the then mayor Cayetano Gippini and the help of the bishop of Madrid-Alcalá, managing to inaugurate the newly fixed parish church in 1889.

During the dawn of May 25th, 1913, the church's roof caved in, forcing it to close until the parish could afford the repairs.⁴ During this same year the diocese became the owner of the historical complex of la Panera Real.⁵

In 1915 the contract to the repairs of the church was publicly auctioned, with a budget of 8.971 pesetas and 22 cents.⁶ It's possible that the church might have been kept partially working despite the caved-in roof, as in obituaries of this same year there are mentions of bells tolling in the parish church for the deceased.⁷

It's known that on 1917 the repairs are underway, but that the state of the walls was so poor they fell, injuring 3 workers.⁸

On February 1919 the contract was terminated due to lack of payment and, even though during June of this year new budgets were being drafted to continue the renovations, this project would end up abandoned in favor of rebuilding the Panera Real, which had sustained great damages during the Spanish Independence War, as to turn it into a new parish church for Guadarrama.⁹

At the start of the 20s the new church was open, but it's not until 1929 when it's officially registered.¹⁰

After the Spanish Civil War

At the start of the Spanish Civil War, in 1936, the structure of La Torre is still standing, as it can be seen in photographs of the time.¹¹

The Spanish Civil War left it again in a ruined state, only standing the mudéjar apse and the romanico tower, with the outer walls of the main body barely remaining upright.¹² The new church also suffered great damage.

In 1943 the Works to rebuild the new church (former Panera) were visited by the head of the Devastated Regions Directorate, and, during the 40s, services for the departed started to be held again.¹³

⁴ [La Época \(Madrid. 1849\). 11/6/1913, n.º 22.493](#)

⁵ Corella Suárez, P. (2015) 77-78

⁶ [Diario oficial de avisos de Madrid. 25/2/1915](#)

⁷ [La Tribuna \(Madrid. 1912\). 15/10/1915](#)

⁸ [El Sol \(Madrid. 1917\). 13/2/1919](#)

⁹ Corella Suárez, P. (2015) 81-90

¹⁰ Corella Suárez, P. (2015) 91

¹¹ [Ahora \(Madrid\). 25/7/1936](#)

¹² [Guadarrama, Románico Digital](#)

¹³ [FE. Falange Española. 10/7/1943](#)

In regards to La Torre, it was then proposed to turn it into a hermitage, an abandoned idea; they even closed up the atrium to try and turn the building into two houses, but this was also an abandoned project.

Still in the 70s, and despite everything, the ruined tower was the most visually striking point of the town and its surroundings: a place with formidable views. This made the townhall decide to buy the building from the episcopate in 1977, so they could rebuild the old church and redo its surroundings.¹⁴ It was then decided to start the works, but aiming to preserve as many original parts as possible, with the goal of turning it into “a place of flexible public use, rebuilding, preserving and restoring everything that exists now with architectural value”.

The process of property transferring, the studies for its restoring and adapting, and the allowances of the necessary means to host the new multifunctional uses they wanted to have, lead to the transformation of the old church into the Centro Cultural La Torre in 1986.

And, nowadays, it hosts multiple activities, such as plays, dances, concerts, classical and alternative music festivals, conferences and seminars, while offering an unmatched frame for the presentation and holding of institutional events that the townhall of Guadarrama might want to add a more solemn tint to.

Plus, in this wish to offer more cultural and turistic options to both inhabitants and visitors of Guadarrama, the inside of the tower was adapted so the bell tower portion could be accessed, from where a beautiful panoramic view can be enjoyed, the first visit having taken place in 2010.

¹⁴ [Guadarrama, Románico Digital](#)

ANNEX I: PAINTING ABOUT THE SPANISH INDEPENDENCE WAR

The painting was a commission of the Corporación Municipal headed by Mr. Ángel Brasas in 1954. The title of the painting is “The withdrawal of the french tropas through the town of Guadarrama in 1808”. The painter, Mariano Izquierdo y Vivas, was inspired by a Taunay painting held in the Versailles Museum which title is “Passage de la Guadarrama” (The crossing of Guadarrama).

The painter makes a really personal interpretation of it: the church from the original painting becomes La Torre, the composition, landscape and colors change. It represents the hardships of Winter in the Sierra de Guadarrama: the snow, the difficulty moving cannons and horses, the suffering and pitifulness of the trek.

However, history points out that such trek didn’t take place. After the Somosierra battle in November 1808, and having cleared the way for the French tropas in Madrid, the British army, lead by Moore, performed a distraction move that lead to chase from the French troops up to La Coruña, where Moore boards ships to escape. It’s in this moment when Napoleon passes through Guadarrama and climbs the Alto del León in December 1808.

What’s culturally interesting –and artistically, as the painting is of great quality and made by a famous painter at the time –for the town of Guadarrama is that, during the 50s, when it was decided to get a painting made that captured a moment of its history, of its greatest past, what came to mind was the Spanish Independence War and the passing –and presence and devastation –of the napoleonic troops through the town.

To celebrate the Bicentenary of the start of the Spanish Civil War, the townhall wanted to homage its residents with the restoring of the painting and placement of it on the main wall inside La Torre, with a plaque that reads:

“In memory of those who suffered

And suffer calamities because

Of human injustice”.

The Town of Guadarrama.

May 2008

Bicentenary of the Spanish Independence War

ANNEX II: IMAGES



Illustration 1: State of the tower in 1936, photograph published by the newspaper [Ahora \(Madrid\)](#). 25/7/1936



Illustration 2: State of the tower in 1962, photograph by Ángel Benito Bernaldo de Quirós



Illustration 3: Rehabilitation of the former church in 2003, photograph by Ángel Benito Bernaldo de Quirós

En la madrugada del pasado 25 de Mayo se hundió gran parte de la techumbre de la parroquia de Guadarrama (Madrid), pueblo de más de 1.000 habitantes, siendo inmediatamente cerrada al culto. Aún no ha podido ser reanudado éste por falta de recursos para reparar el referido templo, y con tal motivo el párroco acude á la generosidad de las personas caritativas y piadosas en demanda de socorros.

Illustration 4: News of the church's roof caving in, published by [La Época \(Madrid. 1849\). 11/6/1913, n.º 22.493](#)

Obispado de Madrid-Alcalá

Junta Diocesana de Construcción y Reparación de Templos.

En virtud de lo dispuesto por Real orden de 18 del corriente, se ha señalado el día 22 del próximo mes de Marzo, a la hora de las once de su mañana, para la adjudicación en pública subasta de las obras de **reconstrucción del templo parroquial de Guadarrama**, de esta provincia, bajo el tipo de pre-

supuesto de contrata, importante 2.971 pesetas 22 céntimos.

La subasta se celebrará en la calle de la Pasa, núm. 1, piso bajo, y en los términos prevenidos en la Instrucción publicada con fecha 28 de Mayo de 1877, ante esta Junta diocesana, hallándose demanifiesto en la Secretaría de la misma, para conocimiento del público, planos, presupuestos, pliegos de condiciones y Memoria explicativa del proyecto.

Las proposiciones se presentarán en pliegos cerrados, ajustándose en su redacción al adjunto modelo, debiendo consignarse previamente, como garantía para tomar parte en la subasta, la cantidad de 448 pesetas 57 céntimos, en dinero o en efectos de la Deu-

Illustration 5: news of the renovation's public auction, published by [Diario oficial de avisos de Madrid. 25/2/1915](#)



Illustration 6: obituary for Mr. Fdo. Araujo y Gómez in which the parish church is mentioned, published by [La Tribuna \(Madrid, 1912\). 15/10/1915](#)

Hundimiento de la iglesia de Guadarrama

Tres obreros heridos

El gobernador civil recibió ayer un despacho telegráfico del alcalde de Guadarrama, en el que le daba cuenta de haberse hundido de plano la iglesia en construcción, y que del accidente habían resultado tres obreros heridos. Las pérdidas son de mucha consideración.

Otros edificios amenazan ruina.

Illustration 7: news of the caving in of a wall during renovations, published by [El Sol \(Madrid, 1917\). 13/2/1919](#)

En Pontevedra la Obra Sindical del Hogar construirá un pueblo entero

VEINTISEIS VIVIENDAS PROTEGIDAS FUERON ENTREGADAS EN GUADARRAMA

Madrid 9.—El director general de Regiones Devastadas estuvo en Guadarrama, donde hizo entrega de 26 viviendas a obreros modestos y jornaleros.

Constan de dos plantas y consisten en el Alto de las Leones de Castilla.

Cada vivienda tiene cocina, comedor, cuatro dormitorios amplios, servicio, corral, cobertizo, encerradero de ganado y cuadra.

Luego visitó las obras de la iglesia parroquial, mercado, preventivo infantil antituberculoso y otro grupo de 26 viviendas para jornaleros que se está construyendo.

obras de construcción de un pueblo obrero, integrado por 96 viviendas protegidas.

La entidad constructora es la Obra Sindical del Hogar, y el plazo de ejecución dieciocho meses.—CIFRA.

HUNDIMIENTO EN EL METRO

Madrid 9.—En las obras que la Compañía del Metropolitano realiza para la construcción de la nueva línea, Goya-Argüelles, se produjo esta mañana un hundimiento en calle de Goya, es-

El dictamen sobre el proyecto de ley de Ordenación Universitaria, publicado en el número 13 del "Boletín Oficial de las Cortes"

Illustration 8: news of the visit of the General Director for Devastated Regions to the rebuilding of the newer church, former Panera, published by [FE. Falange Española. 10/7/1943](#)

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