



# Customs Museum

## EXHIBITION GUIDE

# metamorphose de um lugar



**Opening hours**  
Tuesday to Friday: 10h00 - 13h00 (last entry 12h), 14h00-18h00 (last entry 17h)

**Contacts**  
Edifício da Alfândega  
Rua Nova da Alfândega • 4050-430 Porto  
Tel. 22 340 30 00 • Fax 22 340 30 98  
[museu@amtc.pt](mailto:museu@amtc.pt)



MTC  
Museu dos Transportes e Comunicações



### Nucleus IV

#### Memories of the customs system

##### HISTORICAL TRAJECTORY

Keys and compasses are the iconographic elements which testify to the different milestones in the historical evolution of the customs houses in Portugal: a slow consolidation of a public services system and the founding of a professional body, which in turn produced an identity and certain nostalgia for the occupation. (Senhora da Atalaia, Senhora das Alfândegas).

##### THE EMPIRE OF SYMBOLS

The limited collection of artefacts translates to a symbolic language of simple everyday gestures: the day to day life in customs was limited to inspecting things (lanterns), carefully guarding accounts (coffers), marking time (clocks), proving official register (white stamps and seals), verifying weights and measurements of products, or working with the mechanical apparatus for writing and counting.

##### Display

1 - 76. Balances, sets of weights, night lamps, lanterns, seals, artisan meters, compasses, keys, wall clocks, official stamps in wood, boxes of official stamps, typewriters and calculators, lead seals, white seals, inventory cards, chair, writing desk...

Lisbon Customs House and Porto Customs House.



### Nucleus V

#### New uses of an historic building – The Museum of Transport and Communication

##### THE NEW CONFIGURATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND THE FUTURE OF THE BUILDING

With the increased flow of foreign trade the customs offices re-located to Matosinhos, within convenient distance of the Leixões port, Pêdas Rubras airport and the container terminal at Freixoiro. Portugal's integration into the European Community changed the nature of intra-European trade and the increasing traffic of big transatlantic liners, made the old river port and the building of the New Customs House redundant. The dimensions and monumental character of the New Customs House building made it a central feature in the waterfront landscape of Porto, and demanded that it be put to use for the varied cultural benefit of the general public. New plans for the future use of the building were put forward in 19 (?), by the Association for the Museum of Transport and Communication.

##### REcuperation OF THE SPACE

The, by now, old building of the New Customs House and its warehouse had fallen into disrepair after long years of administrative use, but were reclaimed for new purposes in 1990. The architect responsible for the restoration works, Eduardo Souto Moura, took up the challenge of designing a project which would incorporate the principle features of a fortified warehouse, highlighting the specific materials (granite, iron, wood), but allow for the creation of new spaces to serve both present and future needs.

##### THE BUILDING AND ITS USES

###### – Permanent exhibitions

The Museum offers permanent exhibitions, whose scope and originality attract many different publics.  
"The automobile in space and time"  
"Communication of knowledge and Imagination"

###### – Temporary exhibitions

The museum, as an interactive space, welcomes temporary exhibitions and other cultural events: thus guaranteeing diversity and offering visibility to other institutions.

###### – Conference Centre

Its location, dimensions and logistic facilities make the Museum Building an excellent site for conferences and large meetings.

In October, 1998, the Museum hosted the VIII Ibero-American Summit, which was an important symbolic event attended by a great number of heads of State.

##### Display

Architect plans drawn up by Eduardo Souto de Moura (architect responsible for the redesigning of the building which began in 1993); diverse material illustrating the activities of the Museum of Transport and Communications (permanent and temporary exhibitions), and the Conference Centre.





**Nucleus I**

**Porto: city of commerce**

Historically, the city of Porto has always played an active and important role in international trade. All manner of people and merchants from far off lands have passed through these city walls, bringing life and colour to the city and its port.

Porto is proud of its heritage with *“the city having been founded on barren land, but prospering with trade, shipbuilding and commerce, and possessing rich custom houses worthy of the glory of the kingdom of Portugal”* (Sousa Reis, II, 114).

**The production of places – the city, the river and Miragaia**

**PORTO, THE HISTORIC CITY**

The historical development of a city is a continuous process of renovation and expansion, producing many different layers of meaning and detail. From the original nucleus of Penafieira to the borders of the River Douro and the Foz, the city of Porto is likewise the rich product of many long, contentious years of sovereignty. *“When the old borough of Porto encompassed only the small community around the Cathedral, it was of little importance if the town boundaries went as far as Miragaia, or did not quite reach Biquinha, because the space in between was only wilderness, mountains and olive groves, land of no great value and almost deserted; but as the population grew and the land became peopled, so too were the boundary lines increasingly disputed. The disputes grew with the development of the city and the increased value of that land where today stands the densely populated city of Porto”.* (Pinho Leal, Portugal Antigo e Moderno, S. Nicolau, 70)

**THE RIVER DOURO**

The River Douro demarcates the southern boundary of the city of Porto and has always been the city’s link to the outside world. Through its active port life, the river has sustained relations on many levels. *“In the port straits of the River Douro, dug between steep cliffs, anchored a fleet of boats, brigs, schooners and yachts, a whole network of masts, yards and rigging, so dense that a good sailor could swing through the air of this labyrinth with the greatest of ease”* (Ricardo Jorge, Brasil! Brasil, 19)

**MIRAGAIA, BETWEEN LAND AND WATER**

From its suburbs to its urban centre, Miragaia is, together with S. Nicolau, a riverside community which characterises the constant reorganisation of space in function of human design and need. It was on the beach of Miragaia that the New Customs House was built (1860/1870). *“Miragaia, in the not so distant past, was outside the city walls... Miragaia was almost entirely populated by seafarers... where there was land to spare”...* (Pinho Leal, Portugal Antigo e Moderno, Miragaia, 243) *“Rua da Nova Alfândega embraced around 200 houses and 225 fires that constituted a dense population from the mother church to the old Porta Nova city gate, and from the church and Rua de S. Francisco to Rua de Sobre o Muro”...* (Pinho Leal, Portugal Antigo e Moderno, S. Nicolau, 41)

**Nucleus II**

**The Customs System and the city of Porto’s commerce**

The Customs House is a “storehouse for the entrance and exit charges on goods and produce” (Ferreira Borges). As an institution with a strong system of hierarchies, a specific body of legislation and a particular set of working practices, the customs house forged its place in a national system which, with the arrival of Liberalism, was restricted to the control of international commerce.



**THE CUSTOMS SYSTEM IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE STATE AND THE NATIONAL ECONOMY**

The fixing of tariffs, levying of taxes on the import and export of merchandise and vigilance of contraband are the essential tasks of customs houses. The Customs system was a determining factor in the construction of the modern State, constituting as it did the main source of national revenue for many years, and helping to demarcate the zones of circulation. Through the levying of various kinds of taxes, the customs system helped to model the national economy, pushing it between free-trade or protectionism according to the customs policies adopted.

**FROM THE CUSTOMS HOUSE OF D. AFONSO IV TO THE OLD CUSTOMS HOUSE AND THE VARIOUS WAREHOUSES**

The first written references of any kind of customs charges in Porto is dated 1123 (charter of Bishop D. Hugo). During the Middle Ages, the control of the profits from the port was a source of great conflict between the Crown and the Bishop (the conflict was resolved in 1405 when the king, D. João I, transferred the jurisdiction of the borough to the Crown). Around 1320, King D. Afonso IV had created an “almazem” (customs house) to control the revenue from the taxes on goods for the Crown. Despite various extensions over time, this Old Customs House could no longer support the great flow of commerce at the beginning of 20th century, and was thus forced to further expand to various warehouses along the waterfront.

**MOVE TO THE NEW CUSTOMS HOUSE**

The dispersion of the Customs services and the lack of security in the warehouses were considerable obstacles to the smooth running of commerce and trade. It became a matter of some urgency to construct a completely new building in order to give proper dignity to the public service and make commerce more efficient. The merchants of Porto petitioned the liberal courts to authorise a new customs house: *“The Commission asks this of your Majesty as one of the greatest goods you may bestow on the Praça do Porto: “That is, to construct a Customs House in a location that combines the following advantages: 1st – unloading on the old quay; 2nd – low costs of transportation; 3rd – warehouses that are spacious and in proportion with the present commercial activity in Porto”* (Commission of Commerce, 1823). But the construction of the New Customs House only became a reality in 1859 when the large waterfront space on the beach of Miragaia, was finally decided upon for the building’s location.

**THE NEW CUSTOMS HOUSE IN MIRAGAIA – URBAN RE-PLANNING AND SANITATION**

The process of building the New Customs House, built on a landfill in order to retain the sand, was beset with difficulties: -Walled spaces were destroyed or built over, with the Porta Nobre city gate and the tower next to it disappearing. -Two hundred buildings were torn down to make way for a new, more hygienic arrangement, with new buildings which were, *“very well- built and elegant, with good light and air”*, in contrast with those *“buildings that had been demolished, which were filthy and squalid with age and of haphazard design according to the confines of the streets and walled-in land”*. (Pinho Leal, Portugal Antigo e Moderno, S. Nicolau). -The course of the River Frio (or the Ribeiro das Virtudes), which had previously flowed into the River Douro at the Miragaia beach, was redirected to the east. -The Botequim do Pepino, a house of ill repute, with *“fallen women, dancing, and dishonourable men”*... disappeared. -The Postigo dos Banhos went. So too did Rua dos Banhos, onto which opened Rua Nova da Alfândega, which became the main thoroughfare in the area.

Display 1 - 18. Diverse Customs documentation from 1761 to 1942 – Customs Houses Rules, Customs Codes, Registers of Legislation, Registers of Correspondence, Customs Tariffs, Customs Reforms, Compilations of Documents... Porto Customs House Library.



**Nucleus III**

**Images of the New Customs House**

After various requests, projects and solutions for finance, the construction of the New Customs House began on May 15, 1859, based on a project put forward by the French engineer C.F.G. Colson. The architecture was to comply with the following practical objectives, as set out by the government using an interesting combination of granite, iron, wood and brick, the New Customs House will be a *“building of architectural elegance, but of simple, robust construction, fire-proof, and safe from the tides and floods of the River Douro”*. Due to its localisation and dimension, the building eventually monopolised the waterfront panorama of Porto, obscuring the historic houses of Miragaia from view and forever changing the traditional image of the area.

**THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE BUILDING – GENERAL SPACES AND STRUCTURES**

Comprising five distinct sections, the building of the New Customs House is built around a central body of three floors for the use of administrative services (management, reception, stowage, inspection, weighing, counting, treasury, statistics, archives, complaints court), with four lateral bodies functioning as warehouses. Each warehouse had four floors, one of which was subterranean, and they were all joined by the indoor patios that were earth-floored areas used for the storage of hazardous merchandise.

**COMMUNICATION LINES (NEW ROAD AND RAILWAY LINE) – THE ROLE OF THE CMP (PORTO TOWN COUNCIL) AND THE ACP (PORTO COMMERCE ASSOCIATION)**

A new street, Rua Nova da Alfândega, was purpose built to link to the building to the city centre. The street had to be raised above the existing level of Miragaia beach, in such a way to link the area of S. Francisco to Messarelos. The building was also linked to the railway station of Campanhã (1888) by way of a new branch line, which involved the construction of a new tunnel and station. Exterior winches, elevators and internal rail lines assured the fast flow of merchandise between the various warehouses.

**HUMAN RESOURCES**

Quite how many hands helped to build the New Customs House and where they were then put to work in its daily activities remains unknown. However, there were moments in the construction of the building when the number of people working on the Project surpassed a thousand. And with time, the customs system, in general, became one of the largest state employers, employing huge numbers of in- house bureaucrats and creating jobs in other related services, especially those of transport. Of the employees who worked there, there remain some registers, identity cards, examples of uniforms worn and various other artefacts.



Display 1 - 48. Diverse equipment/instruments used by the customs house employees – keys and key holders, employee time clocks, caps, uniforms, megaphones, employee identity cards, photograph albums, illustrations of uniforms, firearms belonging to the Fiscal Guards, emblems, regalia, badges... Lisbon Customs House and Porto Customs House.

**WORKING ENVIRONMENTS AND ARTEFACTS**

In their day to day working lives, the customs men were entirely focused on the business of making money. Thus, they developed particular routines within a complex system of hierarchies and labour division, which the client needed to know his way around. The simple examples of equipment which remain of that bureaucratic order only have significance if the global structure of the system is understood. The symbols of the organisational structure which have survived pertain mainly to the dominion of the merchandise and merchants, from the verification of the authenticity of the merchandise, to the treatment of the goods in the warehouse and the transportation despatch orders.

**Treasury**

Display 49 - 78. Diverse equipment/instruments used in the Customs House Treasuries – cases for transporting money, post sacks, ink bottles, inkwells, desk bells, stamps, blotting paper, desk lamp, calculating machine, coffers for Money and other valuables, embalmed caiman and cobra (seized by the Porto Customs House), viola used for carrying olive oil contraband between Portugal and Spain during the Second World War... Lisbon Customs House and Porto Customs House.

**Warehouse**

Display 79 - 97. Diverse equipment/instruments used in the Custom House Warehouses – funnel, water flagons, olive oil pitcher, nail pullers, metal needles, fire hose nozzles, dynamometers, yardsticks, weights with stand... Lisbon Customs House and Porto Customs House.

**Dispatches**

Display 98 - 120. Diverse equipment/instruments used in Dispatches –revenue stamps, white seals, registers, ink bottles, official stamps, identification tags, staplers, boxes of staples... Lisbon Customs House and Porto Customs House.

**Laboratory**

Display 121 –185. Diverse equipment/instruments used in the Customs House Laboratories – densimeters, alcoholmeter, instrument for the extraction of fat, test tube stands, measuring sticks, glass balloon flasks, pipettes, manometer, holosteric barometer, basic and with thermometer, boxes with weights, balances, level with lens, microscopes, sextant, colorimeter, laboratory slides, flasks and beakers, test tubes, retort, evaporator, pycnometer, various receptacles (flask, tubes, cups), mortar, measuring tapes, laboratory cupboard... Lisbon Customs House and Porto Customs House.