

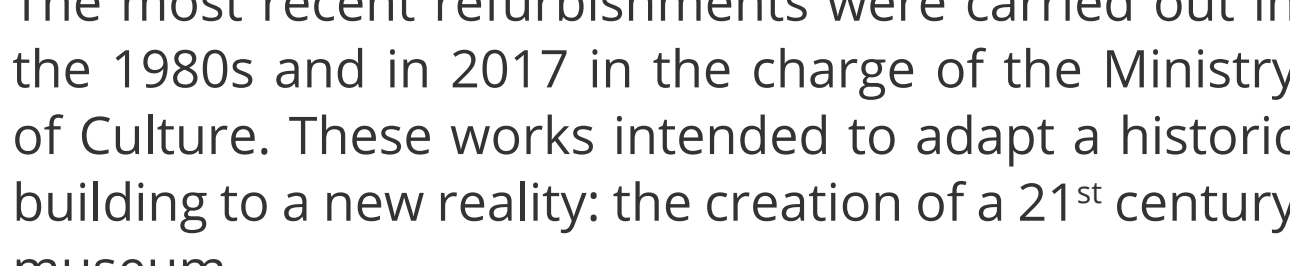
THE SANT FRANCESC CONVENT, CURRENT SEAT OF THE MUSEU DE MENORCA

The Museu de Menorca is located on one of the city's most emblematic sites: the former Convent of Jesus. Founded in 1459, it was the first convent of the Franciscan Order in the city of Maó. Destroyed in 1535 by a Turkish assault, construction of the new Convent of Sant Francesc was initiated on the same site.

Construction began nearly 100 years after its destruction, with some of the ruins of the first convent being utilised. According to documentation in the custody of the Maó Historic Archives, much interesting data on its construction is still available today:

- In 1648, the remains of the previous buildings were redistributed and the stables and refectory (dining room) were built as two new areas to be used in community service.
- Between 1694 and 1695, notable progress was made and a quarter of the convent and half of the cloister were completed. The following year, the outer area was expanded with four monastic cells and two wings of the cloister.
- Between 1700 and 1705, the convent's entire northern wing was constructed as well as other sections of the building that included services: cells, a pantry, the upper cloister, the attics and a cellar.

In the 19th century, refurbishments were made to the convent thanks to a Philippine monk, who undertook all of the expenses. These tasks would see the completion of the main façade with the entrance portico, the cells were extended and the western wing was restructured.



Convent's cloister with central cistern

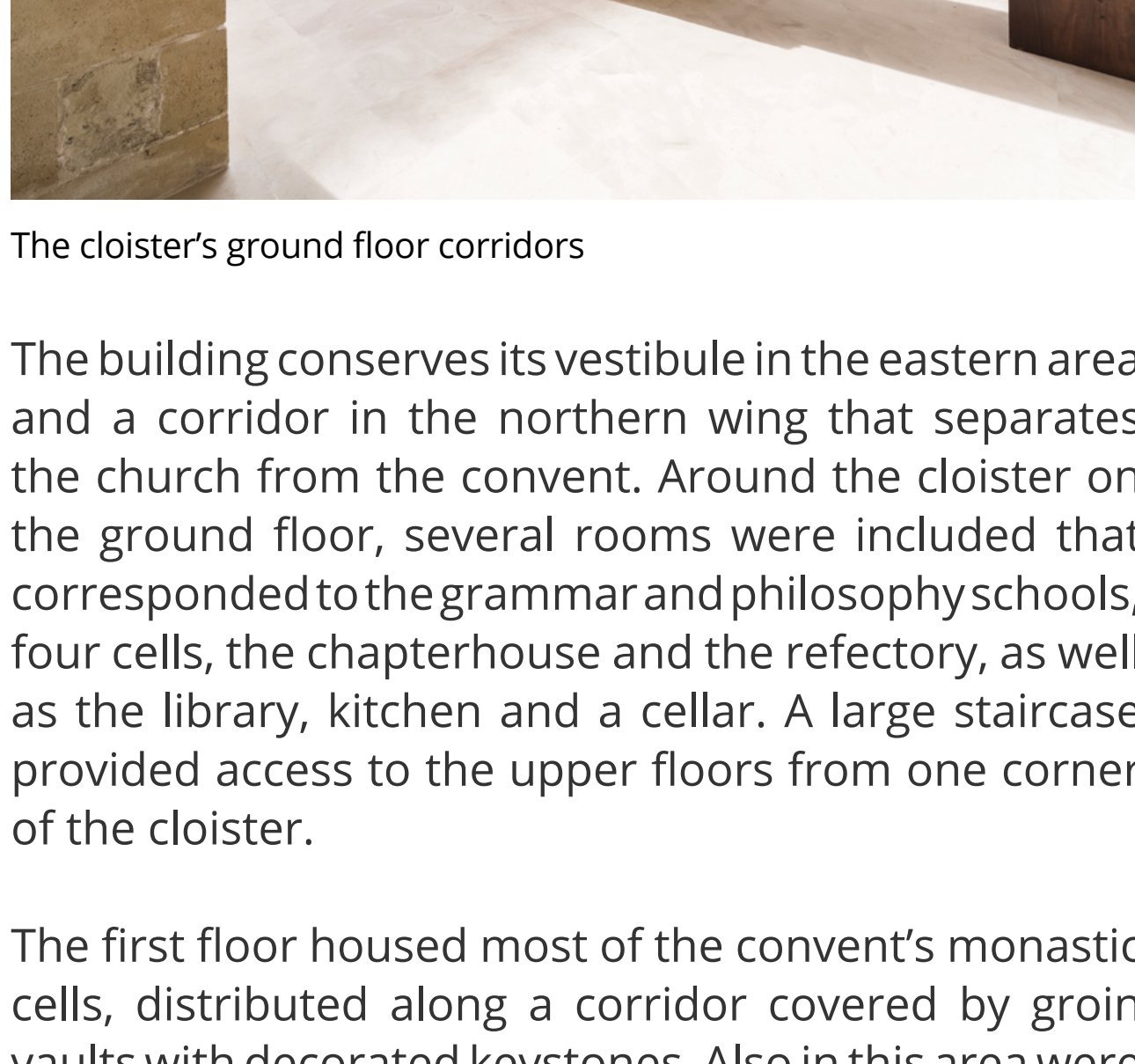
The most recent refurbishments were carried out in the 1980s and in 2017 in the charge of the Ministry of Culture. These works intended to adapt a historic building to a new reality: the creation of a 21st century museum.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE SANT FRANCESC CONVENT

The Sant Francesc Convent is a historic building (declared an Spanish Asset of Cultural Interest) thanks to its centuries-long architectural evolution. It has, however, remained primarily intact, with the original spatial distribution of the old convent.

The building's central nerve is its magnificent cloister. Square in shape, it stands three storeys tall, thus serving as the backbone for the structure's different spaces. Continuous polyhedral pilasters unite its three storeys, providing a sensation of verticality and rhythm to an area that is notably robust. The ground floor connects the side corridors to the patio, opening into semicircular arches. These galleries are crowned by groin vaults, with decorated keystones, and are separated by toral arches.

The cloister's character is imposed through its decoration, which combines the overlay of classical orders in the capital stones with features characteristic of Menorcan baroque. Nevertheless, the decoration is quite subdued, as is compulsory of the Franciscan Order.



The cloister's ground floor corridors

The building conserves its vestibule in the eastern area and a corridor in the northern wing that separates the church from the convent. Around the cloister on the ground floor, several rooms were included that corresponded to the grammar and philosophy schools, four cells, the chapterhouse and the refectory, as well as the library, kitchen and a cellar. A large staircase provided access to the upper floors from one corner of the cloister.

The first floor housed most of the convent's monastic cells, distributed along a corridor covered by groin vaults with decorated keystones. Also in this area were the infirmary and the barber. The second floor had the same layout as the lower floors and was used for cells. It shows flat ceilings with no decorative elements. The third floor housed the attics. The outer area of the northwest wing had a vegetable garden, stables and a mill.

The convent's most interesting decorative elements can be seen on the ground and first floors in the keystones and coats of arms, sculptured in *marès* sandstone with decorations of religious symbols, floral motifs and heraldic coats of arms. This latter type represented crests of the families that took part in the building's construction through donations. It is the most noteworthy heraldic ensemble in the city of Maó.

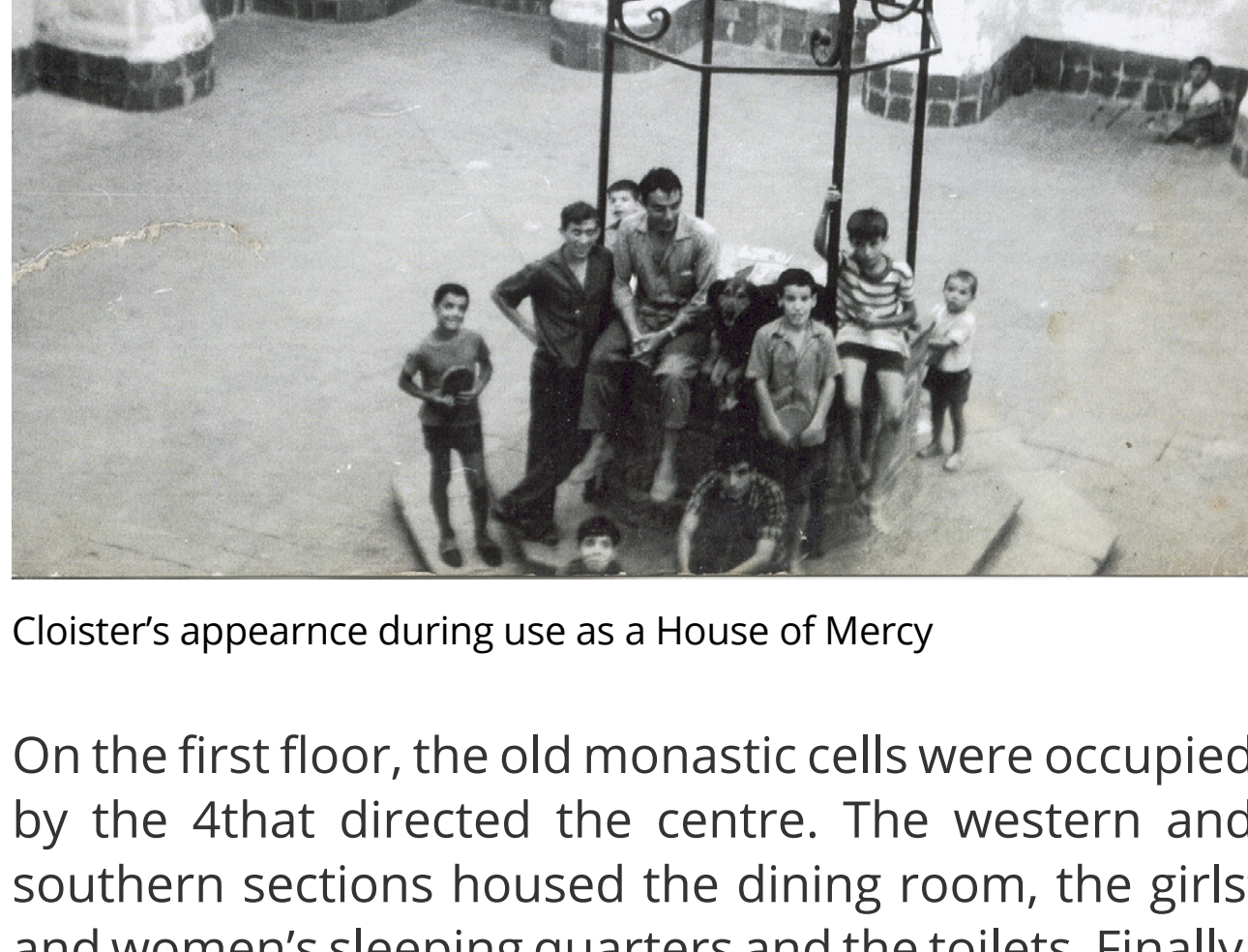


Keystones with coats of arms

USES OF THE BUILDING

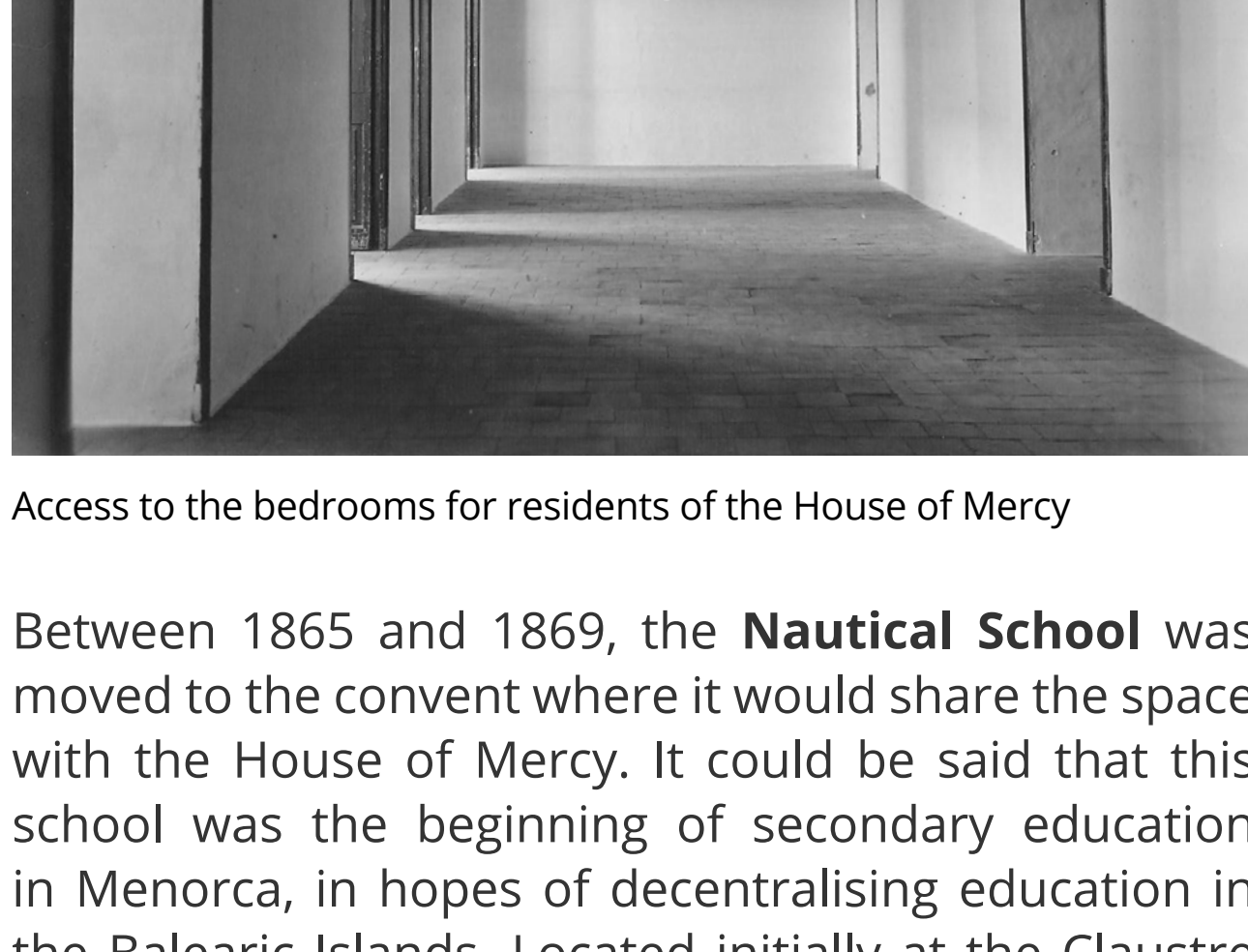
In 1835, with the Ecclesiastical Confiscations of Menizábal and the expulsion of the Franciscans, the convent's destiny would change. From that moment, the property was placed at the disposal of the municipality and was used in various services.

From 1840 until the 1960s, it was used as a **House of Mercy**, to subsequently become a naval school and finally a secondary school institution.



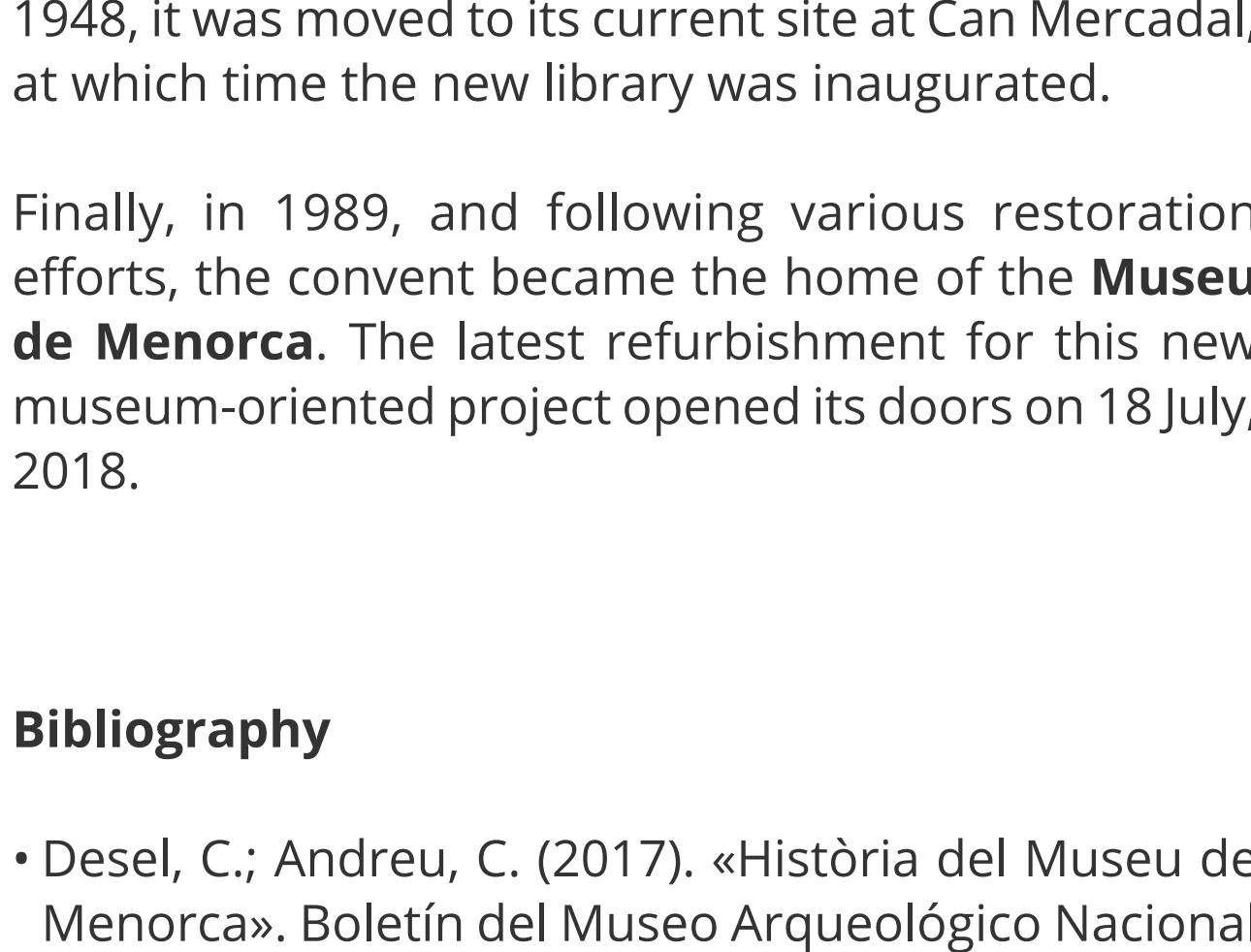
Group photo before the convent's façade

During this period, the layout of the different areas was altered: the convent's old refectory was turned into a theatre (from 1948), the old kitchen became a kitchen and dining room for boys and men, the cloister's patio and the outside of the southern wing became a play area for sheltered boys and girls, the ground floor of the southern wing was the house laundry and the basement was used as a pantry.



Cloister's appearance during use as a House of Mercy

On the first floor, the old monastic cells were occupied by the 4th that directed the centre. The western and southern sections housed the dining room, the girls' and women's sleeping quarters and the toilets. Finally, the second floor was used as bedrooms for boys and men.



Access to the bedrooms for residents of the House of Mercy

Between 1865 and 1869, the **Nautical School** was moved to the convent where it would share the space with the House of Mercy. It could be said that this school was the beginning of secondary education in Menorca, in hopes of decentralising education in the Balearic Islands. Located initially at the Claustre del Carme, the second school year was taught at the Convent of Sant Francesc in 1865 and 1866. Three years later, the new school year was inaugurated as the Institut Lliure d'Ensenyament Mitjà (Open Institute for Middle Learning), and in 1891, it was granted provincial status. Finally, in 1963, the centre was moved to its current location at the IES Joan Ramis i Ramis school.

In 1867, a **library** was also opened at the Convent of Sant Francesc, occupying the old refectory. At its inception, it housed 9,600 volumes that originated from several convents from around the island. In 1948, it was moved to its current site at Can Mercadal, at which time the new library was inaugurated.

Finally, in 1989, and following various restoration efforts, the convent became the home of the **Museu de Menorca**. The latest refurbishment for this new museum-oriented project opened its doors on 18 July, 2018.

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