



# HISTORY ON OUR DOOR-STEP... ONE SQUARE MILE.



## Jumbo

### Did you Know?

- Jumbo Water Tower is a water tower at the Balcerne Gate in Colchester, Essex. Charles Clegg (c.1855-c.1904), the Borough Surveyor and Engineer, designed the structure.
- The tower is 40.1m tall overall and contains 1.2 million red bricks.
- The tower was nicknamed 'Jumbo' after the London Zoo elephant as a term of derision in 1882 by Reverend John Irvine who was annoyed that the tower dwarfed his nearby rectory at St. Mary-at-the-Walls.
- Construction took around 20 months and was completed in 1883 .
- The tank is constructed of cast-iron bolted panels and when it was in use could hold 1069 cubic metres (37,800 cubic ft) of water.
- A central cast iron spiral stair rises 157 steps to the tower room.
- The total weight of the tower is over 5,000 tons
- In December 2021 the tower was leased by Paul Flatman to North Essex Heritage for a 150 year term. The Trust plans to adapt the tower to house a restaurant, visitor experience and historical interpretation space.

Victorian Colchester had a very poor water supply, relying for the most part on unsanitary wells and a few large cisterns. One such cistern was located inside the old Roman Balcerne Gate, near St Mary's church. A private company, The Waterworks Company, supplied water to wealthy customers for just a few hours a day, and eventually took over the Balcerne Gate cisterns and built a large reservoir.

Throughout the first half of the 19th century several damaging fires broke out in central Colchester, and the time it took water to arrive at the fire scene meant that many business and private houses were badly damaged. In 1849 an outbreak of cholera drove home the point; a better solution was needed.

In 1875 the Public Health Act made local Councils responsible for ensuring public health; it was the jolt that Colchester's Council needed to take action. In 1880 the Council purchased the Waterworks Company and proposed a new water tower to supply water to all of Colchester, 24 hours a day.

Plans were approved in 1881, with a budget of £6,700. Over Reverend Irvine's objections, contracts were awarded in 1882 (though the tower was moved to a site 60 feet from his rectory). And it seems he might have had valid objections, for, rather than supplying all of Colchester's water 24 hours a day, the finished tower could only supply water 6 hours a day.

The tower was officially opened on 27 September 1883, 20 months after construction began. Either by design or through a curious coincidence, 20 months is the gestation period of an elephant.

<https://www.britainexpress.com/counties/essex/properties/jumbo.htm>

