



Eiffel: The Genius Who Reinvented Himself

David I Harvie

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This is the story of Gustave Eiffel (1832-1923) and of the conception, and controversial construction of the tower that bears his name, perhaps the most famous tall building in the world. The Eiffel Tower was erected in 1887-9 on the Champs-des-Mars in Paris at a cost of ?260,000 for the World Exhibition of 1889.

Originally an unpopular project, which was widely satirised, it became an instant favourite when completed. Visitors flocked to see the new building and, until 1930, the tower was the highest building in the world. But there is more to Eiffel than the tower that bears his name. Born in Dijon in 1832, Eiffel designed aqueducts and bridges throughout the world. In 1885, he designed the interior load-bearing skeleton and mechanisms of the Status of Liberty. Yet, just at the point of his greatest success, Gustave Eiffel signed contracts for the project which was to bring scandal on his name - the construction of locks for the Panama Canal. Implicated in indictments of fraud, Eiffel was fined and sentenced to two years' imprisonment. Although later exonerated, the Panama affair ruined him, and the stain of scandal never quite left him.

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