

The Berlin Wall 13 August 1961 - 9 November 1989
by Frederick Taylor.
Bloomsbury 2007.

Having been impressed by Frederick Taylor's previous book Dresden I keenly awaited his second. The Berlin Wall shows all of its author's previous attention to detail, grasp of historical events across a wide period of time and overall literary quality, and has the added bonus, in this reviewer's case, of describing events that occurred during my lifetime.

In a post-glasnost, post-Communist world, the story of the Berlin Wall, and of the East Germany with which it was so inextricably linked, seems almost incredible. Yet the reality of it is made abundantly clear by Frederick Taylor in a lucid and pacy way, and the story of the fate of the remnants of the Reich after the Second World War, and especially of the way in which they became a battleground for the Cold War between East and West is presented in such a detailed and coherent manner as to make the fear, suspicion and enmity that was evinced almost palpable.

The Berlin Wall is much more than just a history of the Wall, from its erection in 1961 to its demolition in the heady days of November 1989, coincidentally on the anniversary of Kristallnacht; it is a history of the two Germanys, and also of the dead hand of a Communism that was morally corrupt from its outset, politically inept and economically hopeless.

This is an immensely valuable contribution to the history of the 20th century and deserves to be widely read.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh