

Berlin Trip: Aylesford History January 2020

Thanks must go to all parents, staff and especially students for making the Berlin trip such a fantastic experience for all involved.

Day 1 started very early indeed and tremendous character was shown by parents, students and staff alike in making it to school for 4:15am and leaving for Gatwick on time. All were in good spirits (apart from the necessity to wear green jumpers) and enjoyed the opportunity to have a good breakfast in Weatherspoon's before heading for the right gate after our first group photo opportunity of the trip!



The flight went smoothly and particular courage was shown by Ellie who hadn't flown before and others who were nervous of flying but showed good resilience regardless of their fears. An early escape attempt came from Harry who tried his best to be left at the airport and has a lot to thank German border security for when they showed unexpected compassion and allowed us to collect his passport from the bag that he had safely stowed in the hold.

After dropping our bags in our hotel, we had our first sight of the Brandenburg gate, Holocaust Memorial and the location (now carpark) of Hitler's Fuhrer bunker and place of death on a thought provoking guided walking tour. This was followed by a trip to the Check Point Charlie Museum where students were able to remind themselves of the key points of both their Nazi Germany and Cold War exams. Cue for group photo opportunity number 2:



At this point students were starting to tire and it was time to check into our rooms properly before enjoying an evening meal together.

Our day of sightseeing however was not done and students got their first opportunity to travel by S Bahn to one of the most significant buildings in Berlin, the Reichstag. Despite tiring after a very long day, students really enjoyed following round the audio tour, seeing the chamber where the German government still sits and remembering the significance of the Reichstag fire in 1933. This also provided the perfect back drop to another couple of photo opportunities before returning to the hotel for a much deserved rest.

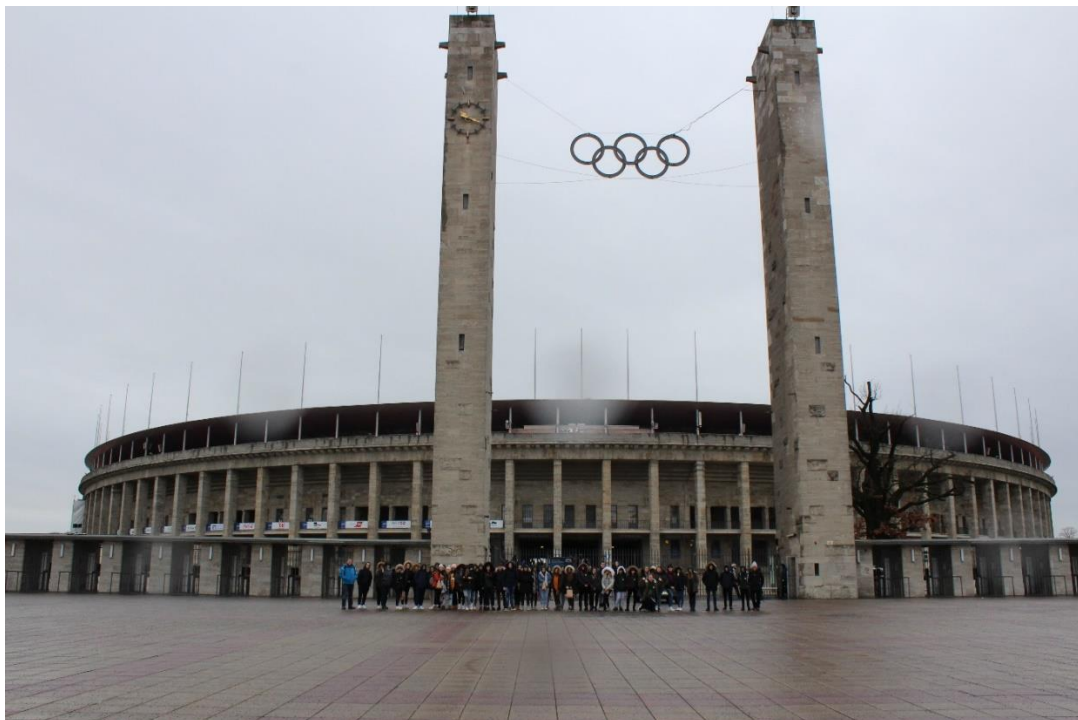
Most followed this course of action although Will was 'rudely awoken' by a rendition of happy birthday at midnight from his friends...not many can say they had that happen in Berlin on their 16th birthday!





Day 2 started with breakfast at 8 and another trip on the S Bahn to the Olympic stadium.

Tom and Harry showed tremendous confidence in entertaining the locals with some outstanding dancing on the train and made a German 'friend' who accompanied them with some German music on his phone. The Olympic Stadium was a place steeped in history and was where Jesse Owens ran the 100m in 10.37 in front of a very angry Adolf Hitler in 1936 and was also one of the best examples of Nazi architecture used in now infamous propaganda reels. We also had the chance to sit on the invitation only VIP seats, which were in the same place that Hitler stood when watching those Olympics and it was difficult to believe that those events had happened in such a modern looking stadium. The tour also gave sports fans a chance to see the inner workings of a FIFA 5* rated stadium with indoor training facilities, a heated pitch, changing room facilities and for students to walk in the steps of sporting greats like Zinedine Zidane who was sent off in the 2006 World Cup Final. Most importantly however, it was also a place for another photo opportunity before our return journey on the train despite the rain.





Next stop was the Topography of Terror. This depicts the horrific treatment of the Jews and anybody seen as subhuman by the Nazi regime. Students showed great curiosity in asking our guides and teachers relevant and insightful questions despite dropping energy levels and it was at this point that a chance to sit down in McDonalds was greatly appreciated by staff and students alike. Feeling refreshed, the students enjoyed the next museum, the Berlin Panorama Museum and it showed an outstanding depiction of the Berlin Wall as if you were looking into the East from West Berlin. Students started to get a real sense of the fact that West Berlin was completely cut off from the East and students realised how looking into the East from the West was an attraction due to the secretive nature of the Communist Government. This prepared us perfectly for our next stop and for the view from the TV Tower that was built to show off how futuristic Communist East Germany was. Again, fantastic resilience and courage was shown by students who were either afraid of heights or lifts travelling at 6m/s. From the top you could see the places we had seen on the trip so far, as well as continuing to get a clearer picture of where the divide between east and west was when looking at the Brandenburg Gate and the Reichstag.

Our 2nd day concluded with a walk along the East Side Gallery (a series of paintings on the remaining parts of the wall). This started from our hotel and led us straight to where we enjoyed an evening of bowling. All students had a fantastic time competing with each other and trying to beat our Mancunian guide who became an object of fascination for many students who were often surprised to find how normal someone from so far north was! It was also time for Will to celebrate being 16 in style!

The last day started with a final guided walking tour of the wall and students were able to see first-hand the impact of the wall for those living on both sides. Machine gun posts and control towers were the norm and the shoot on sight policy followed by East German guards was shocking to envisage. Shopping was next on the agenda at Alexanderplatz (near the TV tower) where students and staff enjoyed some time buying gifts for parents or trying some of the 'German cuisine' (kebab) on offer before making our way to the DDR Museum. This was another excellent opportunity for students to see first-hand what the lives of people in the East was like. Students jumped at the chance to try out the prison cell, try out the Trabant escape attempt and virtually try on the clothes that were fashionable at the time.

We then returned to the coach, and visited the Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp. This was an emotional and eye opening experience for all concerned with students able to see the horrific living conditions, learn about the brutal treatment of those that stayed there and their treatment just before and just after their final

moments. After such a sobering experience it was understandably difficult for many to transition back to the normality of returning to our hotel, having dinner and collecting our bags. However, on the way home the good humour returned and the Aylesford inquisition of our guide Nick from Manchester began again. Students were amazed that somebody from 'so far north' was so similar to those from the south, apart from the fact that he strangely liked gravy with his chips! Also of course, before we left the hotel there was time for one more group photo!



Thanks must go to Mr Neeve for organising the trip and to Mrs McGuckin, Mr Statham, Mrs Hodgson and Mrs Gryntus (Photographer) for supporting him so ably. Thanks must also go to Nick from Time Travel Education who did a fantastic job of arranging the logistical side of the trip and calmly ensuring that we made it to the right place at the right time. We do not want to do the trip without him if we go again!

Finally, thank you to all the students who showed so many of the character strengths that the school encourages, for having such a good sense of humour, being so interested in the history of the places we visited and making the trip as successful and straightforward as it possibly could be.

Mr Neeve (Just relieved I returned them all to you in one piece!)