

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> University of Chester		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> Area Studies		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Public Perceptions of East Germany: Enhancing Understanding		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2008 – 2014		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b> Richard Millington	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b> Dr, Senior Lecturer	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b> 2012 – ongoing
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2017 – 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		

**1. Summary of the impact** (indicative maximum 100 words)

Public perceptions of East Germany have long been shaped by dominant tropes such as political oppression and key moments that received international coverage, such as the fall of the Berlin Wall. Dr Richard Millington's research offers new insight into life in East Germany by exploring lesser-known historical events from the perspectives of the very people that lived through them, and through cultural representation that challenges official narratives. By disseminating his findings in public spaces, he has informed understanding of the lived reality of East Germany and, ultimately, suggests a new way of looking at an often-ignored period.

**2. Underpinning research** (indicative maximum 500 words)

Thirty years after East Germany's demise, there is still a lack of nuanced understanding in the UK of the communist regime and everyday life under its rule. Ignorance of East Germany has most recently been exemplified by political and media comparisons of the UK's Covid-19 lockdown restrictions with the repressive measures implemented by East Germany's Ministry for State Security (*Stasi*) to eliminate political opposition. Such comparisons reveal that the public narrative of East Germany in the UK is of a Big Brother-style dictatorship in which all freedom of thought and action was stifled. There was, however, much more to life in East Germany than the *Stasi*, the Berlin Wall and barbed wire.

Richard Millington is Senior Lecturer in German at the University of Chester where he has taught since 2014. Millington conducts research into East Germany, with the aim of developing a more nuanced understanding of the regime.

A key focus of Millington's work has been the uprising of 17 June 1953. On this day, over 500,000 citizens demonstrated against the regime before the intervention of Soviet tanks and troops. Employing oral history and archival research, Millington examined citizens' memories and awareness of the unrest, in opposition to official narratives. Millington shed new light on how East Germans remembered the uprising and the extent to which the dictatorship was able to shape their memories, thus drawing broader conclusions on the reach of state power. Millington has published the findings of his research. A book chapter [A] in 2011 showed that the regime convinced citizens that the uprising was a taboo and should not be spoken about. A peer-reviewed article [B] in 2013 showed that East German authors and filmmakers who depicted the uprising were able to slip details of the demonstrations past the censors and provide citizens with more information than government propaganda. A peer-reviewed article [C] in 2020 revealed how post-1990 narratives of 17 June 1953 place it within a broader German tradition of resistance to dictatorships. Millington's most extensive exploration of the topic came in the form of his 2014 monograph *State, Society and Memories of the Uprising of 17 June 1953 in the GDR* [D].

Millington's current project investigates 'everyday crime' in East Germany as a means of elucidating the nature and functioning of everyday life there. In March 2019, Millington was awarded a British Academy Small Research Grant for this research.

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Millington has published two peer-reviewed articles on this subject. The first [E] in 2017 analysed the regime's discourse on the phenomenon of criminality as it appeared in the print media. This article showed that the regime constructed legitimacy for its political project in citizens' minds by claiming that only communism could keep them safe from crime. The second article [F], published in 2020, examined the regime's official narrative of crime and found that its political interpretation of the cause of crime hindered its attempts to address the real roots of the problem.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

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- A. Richard Millington, 'Remembering the uprising of 17 June 1953', in *20 Years On: Remembering the German Democratic Republic*, ed. by David Clarke and Ute Wölfel (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 157-169.
- B. Richard Millington, 'The Limits of Control: The "Public Discourse" about the Uprising of 17 June 1953 in Novels and Films in the German Democratic Republic', *German History* 31 (2013), 42-60, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gerhis/ghs122>
- C. Richard Millington, 'The Anniversary Politics of 17 June 1953 since 1990', *German Life and Letters* 73 (2020), 401-19, <https://doi.org/10.1111/glal.12274>
- D. Richard Millington, *State, Society and Memories of the Uprising of 17 June 1953 in the GDR* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)
- E. Richard Millington, "'Crime has no chance": The Discourse of Everyday Criminality in the East German Press, 1961-1989', *Central European History* 50 (2017), 59-85, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008938917000036>
- F. Richard Millington, 'State Power and 'Everyday Criminality' in the German Democratic Republic, 1961-1989', *German History* 38, (2020), 440-60, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gerhis/ghaa048>

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

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Millington has used a variety of means to broaden the extent of his research impact to create beneficiaries beyond an academic audience.

In 2017, Millington created the *EastGermanyOnline* (@DDROnline) Twitter account to share research. The account has 11,306 followers. Beneficiaries include educators who employ the account as a teaching aid. One such beneficiary, a teacher of Advanced History, evidenced the nature and extent of the impact thusly: 'I blend your tweets into my curriculum in many ways, history, economics, popular culture and sports. We use [the tweets] in our class discussion'. The account inspires learning. An MA student noted the extent of the impact: 'I use the tweets in guiding my reading for my MA in History, from simply reading the articles/links you post, to following on from these and looking up areas of interest'. Beneficiaries also include podcast creators who cite *EastGermanyOnline* as a source of inspiration for content creation. The Cold War Conversations podcast (with over 200,000 downloads/month) stated '@DDROnline made me realise that there was an audience for @ColdWarPod'. Millington also uses the account to create impact amongst beneficiaries through debate. In 2019, he asked whether East Germany was just a 'Stasiland'. 7,500 users saw the tweet and 22 engaged in the debate, interacting with other users, and enhancing their knowledge of the subject. [1].

An offshoot account, @17Juni1953live, was created in 2018 to display 'real-time' tweets from participants in the 1953 uprising to the account's 950 followers. This drew on Millington's primary research. Feedback from beneficiaries commented on the extent of the impact: 'I hadn't heard of this uprising before. I have been inspired to learn more about the uprising and East Germany'; 'Your account provided details I was unaware of and encouraged me to think about the uprising in a different way'. The project led to the discovery of new photographs of the uprising. A German

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man saw publicity about the project and came forward with the pictures. The photographs have since been donated to a German historical foundation. Furthermore, the project inspired the Battle of Barnet committee to create similar narratives of the battle from different perspectives, in co-operation with Barnet Museum [2].

Millington has further disseminated his research via podcasts and radio programmes. In 2018, he spoke about 1953 on the Cold War Conversations podcast. This episode has been downloaded 5,300 times [3]. Beneficiaries include Dr Kelly Hignett at Leeds Beckett University who advises students to listen to this episode for her 'Communist Eastern Europe' undergraduate module [4]. In 2019, Millington discussed the Berlin Wall on the Australian ABC radio series 'Rear Vision'. The series had over one million downloads in 2019 [5].

In 2018, Millington published an article in *History Today* (monthly circulation approx. 18,000). 'Day of Dissent in the DDR' was named one of the 'Best Articles of 2018'. Dr Kelly Hignett also advises students studying Communist Eastern Europe to read this article. [6, 7]. In 2020, Millington published 'Who's afraid of the Stasi?' and contributed to the column 'Could the Soviet Union have survived?' [8].

School pupils and the general public count amongst the beneficiaries of Millington's impact. In 2019, he spoke to GCSE and A-Level students at The Bishops' Blue Coat school. All pupils commented that they learned much from the talk and were inspired to find out more. The German teacher at the school also benefitted from the talk, incorporating it into his curriculum. In 2020, Millington gave two public lectures on East German nostalgia. The first - for Chester's U3A - has been viewed 378 times and was described as 'fascinating' and 'thought provoking'. The second – for Chester's Constituency Labour Party – was attended by 20 people and has been viewed 29 times on YouTube. The majority of the feedback received demonstrated enhancement of audience knowledge and inspiration to learn more about East Germany [9].

Millington's efforts to create and enhance understanding of life in East Germany are also evidenced by his staging of the exhibition 'Totally East: Life in East Germany', held at the University of Chester in 2018. Created by the Foundation for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in East Germany, it presented photographs of everyday life in East Germany. Visitors also gained additional insight into this subject thanks to Millington's organisation of a display of East German vehicles. The majority of the feedback showed that visitors had gained new insight into life in East Germany and changed their views of what it had been like [10].

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

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1. EastGermanyOnline: <https://twitter.com/DDROnline>; correspondence with followers.
2. Volksaufstand des 17. Juni 1953: live: <https://twitter.com/17Juni1953live>; <https://17juni1953live.wordpress.com>; correspondence with followers.
3. Cold War Conversations: <https://coldwarconversations.wordpress.com/episode6/>; correspondence with @ColdWarPod
4. Correspondence with a History Lecturer, Leeds Beckett University
5. 'Rear Vision: The Making and Breaking of the Berlin Wall', <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/rearvision/richard-millington/11645924> ; correspondence with 'Rear Vision' producer.
6. 'Day of Dissent in the DDR', *History Today*, <https://www.historytoday.com/archive/feature/day-dissent-ddr>
7. *History Today* 'Best article' list: <https://www.historytoday.com/history-matters/best-articles-2018>
8. 'Who's afraid of the Stasi?', *History Today*, [https://www.historytoday.com/archive/behind-times/who%E2%80%99s-afraid-stasi#:~:text=The%20sinister%20reach%20of%20East,Stasi%20is%20still%20with%20us](https://www.historytoday.com/archive/behind-times/who%E2%80%99s-afraid-stasi#:~:text=The%20sinister%20reach%20of%20East,Stasi%20is%20still%20with%20us;); 'Could the Soviet Union have survived?', *History Today*, <https://www.historytoday.com/archive/head-head/could-soviet-union-have-survived>
9. 'Ostalgie', For the Many Mondays: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5q\\_UYuNuyHY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5q_UYuNuyHY)

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'Totally East: Life in East Germany' exhibition: <https://www1.chester.ac.uk/news/east-german-life-in-focus-photographic-exhibition>  
10. Exhibition visitors book.