

Harry Potter around the UK: An Analysis of Collections and Sites

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Abstract: This study examines scholarly literature and documents sites and collections in the United Kingdom related to the Harry Potter book and movie series and the author J.K. Rowling.

Keywords: Harry Potter, Special Collections, United Kingdom, British Studies, Popular Culture

1. Introduction

‘No story lives unless someone wants to listen’ – J.K. Rowling

The Harry Potter series, both books and movies, has captivated the world for over a decade, and the author herself, Joanne Kathleen Rowling (better known as simply J.K. Rowling) has become a sensation (Nel, 2001). A series of books beginning with an eleven-year old boy finding out that he is a wizard caught the attention of readers everywhere, no matter the age, and launched an international phenomenon which has rarely, if ever, been seen before.

Finding a place where you finally belong- that is what it was for many fans of the series, as much as it must have been for Harry. Here was a place where not only were the freaks accepted, but prized for the very things that made them outcasts from Muggle life. J.K. Rowling gave us a world in which all the rules that made Muggle life difficult seemed turned on their head (Barratt, 2012).

The Harry Potter series has taken the world by storm; its popularity and fan base have inspired fan fiction stories, other novels and works related to the Harry Potter series, apparel, theme parks, and research on different aspects of the series. Researching and understanding the series requires researchers to know where to look for the pertinent information for their topics. The collections and sites examined for this study are the jumping off point for those researchers, a place to find a wealth of knowledge on the Harry Potter series.

1.1 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine sites and collections in the United Kingdom related to the Harry Potter series and author J.K. Rowling.

1.2 Research Questions

- R1. What collections in the United Kingdom contain materials related to the author and what resources do they contain?
- R2. What sites in the United Kingdom are related to the author and the series and in what manner?

1.3 Limitations and Assumptions

This study is limited to sites and resources in the United Kingdom related to Harry Potter and J.K. Rowling. It is assumed that the scholarly literature and resources used in the study are accurate.

1.4 Importance of the Study

A study such as this one that examines the sites and collections relating to a particular literary work or series and author are important to those who are interested in popular culture. The degree of popularity that has been generated by one eleven- year old wizard and the magic that he, his friends, and their journey growing up have inspired are relatable to many and it would be useful to explore sites that influenced the plot of the series or was reflected in the plot.

Collections, particularly those containing primary-source materials, can be even more valuable for researchers. Collections in libraries and museums may hold information on a series or on an author that may be difficult to find other places. Knowing where to look for information is the first step many take when beginning to write, whether it is an article, a book, or a review. Collections can contain artifacts and objects, manuscripts, or plans; one of a kind items not found anywhere else.

This study aims to identify sites and collections relevant to the Harry Potter series of books, movies, the author or any combination thereof, through on-site visits within the United Kingdom to document, examine, and evaluate their influence and relationship.

2. Literature Review

The objective of this literature review is to provide background information on the Harry Potter series, both the books and the films, as well as on the author, J.K. Rowling. The literature review also aims to document a timeline to understand the events that led to creation of the works as well as key events and occurrences thereafter.

2.1 J.K. Rowling, The Harry Potter Books and Movies

J.K. Rowling was born Joanne Kathleen Rowling in July of 1965 (Nel, 2001). Even early on in Rowling's childhood she knew she wanted to be a writer and was continually writing little short stories of her own. As she grew that passion stayed with her, whether working or going to school she would use the computers available to type her stories and fill margins of pages with notes, ideas, and names. Her writing style developed over the years, a style that is characterized by her ability to create new words that still convey to the reader what the meaning is without ever having heard the word before, plots so planned-out that the pace is exactly what she determines but without being superfluous. Everything Rowling writes has a reason, and that is the beauty of these books; they can be read over and over and new details stand out each time (Apel, 2007; Nel, 2001). Rowling knows when she first introduces a character whether they are going to be important and gives them full histories that the reader does not know are important yet, but comes to realize along the way.

Rowling has said many times that the idea for Harry just kind of fell into her head, 'the purest stroke of inspiration I've ever had. Harry arrived pretty much fully formed. I could see him, I could see his little round glasses and I could see his scar. He was a very real boy to me from the beginning' (Nel, 2001, p. 18).

It was on that fateful, delayed, train ride in 1990 that she came up with the idea for Harry and many of the other characters and ideas for the book. However, it would take several more years of writing out the first chapter multiple times to finally start pulling the whole book together. In 1992, Rowling married a journalist in Oporto, Portugal; by 1993, her daughter Jessica was born and by November of 1993, Rowling and Jessica were headed back to Edinburgh to be near Rowling's sister. This is the point in Rowling's life that she is most known for referencing - the time when she was single mother on welfare and battling depression. Even while pursuing her teaching certificate, Rowling pushed to continue to write Harry's story. Her goal was to have it done and to try and publish it before finishing the teaching certificate. Using money from a grant from the Scottish Arts Council, Rowling managed to finally finish the first Harry Potter novel in 1995 (Nel, 2001).

To get the book published, Rowling wrote a letter to literary agent Christopher Little, including a synopsis of the book and a few sample chapters. After many previous rejections, Little made her dream come true; in 1997, Bloomsbury published an initial run of five hundred books of *Harry Potter and the*

Philosopher's Stone and the mania began. The book won the Children's Book of the Year award at the British Book Awards, the Gold Award in the Nestle Smarties Book Prize (which is voted for by children), and then sold to Scholastic in New York for over one hundred thousand dollars.

From this point the books' popularity exploded. Each year a new one was released, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* in 1998 and *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* in 1999, until 2000 when *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* was released and Rowling called for a reprieve. It took three more years until *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* was finished and published in 2003. But in that time another phenomenon had started - the movies were being produced.

In November of 2001, the first movie was released, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. The cast was predominantly British, as was the idea and input of Rowling. By November of 2002, the second movie was released, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (jkrowling.com, 2012). By this point there was no mistaking the Pottermania that ensued - four books and two box office hits and there was still much more to come. In 2003, came the release of the book *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* and in 2004, the movie *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. The year 2005 was big, for both the book *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* and the movie *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* were released.

The year 2007 showcased the release of the fifth movie in the franchise, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, as well as the seventh and final book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. In 2009, 2010, and 2011 *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 1*, and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2* were released respectively, for a total of eight movies, seven books, and one worldwide phenomenon.

The years between were certainly not quiet ones for Rowling; without any more Harry Potter books to write, she created the site Pottermore (<https://www.pottermore.com/en-us/>) as a portal for fans to become a virtual member of the magical world and enter Hogwarts themselves. Users get to work their way through each book chapter by chapter, scene by scene, and uncover hidden gems along the way (Pottermore, 2011). Rowling included previously unknown information on the site about characters and backstories.

In 2010, Universal Studios opened *The Wizarding World of Harry Potter* in Orlando, Florida. The park allows guests to explore the shops and thrills of Diagon Alley and other aspects of the wizarding world, and in 2014 the studio expanded the park to include the village of Hogsmeade from outside the gates of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. This is not the only Harry Potter themed destination. In 2012, Warner Bros Studio London opened *The Making of Harry Potter* at their studio location in Leavesden (jkrowling.com, 2012). This

site was the film location for all eight films and includes not replicas of costumes, props, and sets but the real things (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Scale model of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Warner Bros. Studio, Leavesden, U.K.

Rowling is now married to Doctor Neil Murray and together they have two children, a boy and a girl. They have three homes: a house in Edinburgh, a country house outside the city, and a place in west London. Rowling has an office in an unmarked Georgian building in central Edinburgh where she continues to write and as she says 'I'm a writer, and I will write what I want to write' (Parker, 2012). But as author A.A. Milne found out, after having a work that is such a huge success, everything afterward will be compared to that, readers and critics alike will be searching both consciously and subconsciously to find a semblance of characters and themes they recognize. For Milne, the famous work was *Winnie-the-Pooh*... 'As a discerning critic pointed out, the hero of my latest play, God help it, was 'just Christopher Robin grown up'. So that even when I stop writing about children, I insist on writing about people who were children once' (Parker, 2012).

For Rowling, this showed up with her new book, *The Casual Vacancy*. Readers everywhere thought maybe this would be a continuation of the Harry Potter series in disguise, or maybe they would find the magical elements within this book as well. But that was not to be, for that was not what she was writing. J.K. Rowling wrote a phenomenal series and because of that, in every work from now on readers will be searching for vestiges of magic and of Harry Potter.

2.2 Other Literature Related to Harry Potter

There is a considerable amount of literature available on the Harry Potter series, starting from just a few years after the first book was published and continuing to today and likely for years to come. There are entire books such as Barratt's *The Politics of Harry Potter* (2012) that study themes within the series and ones such as Nel's (2001) that chronicle the life of the author and the beginning of the series. In addition, Nel (2002) wrote an article that compared the books and films, then questioned whether that was a fair comparison.

Critiques of the books include articles such as Tucker's 1999, 'The Rise and Rise of Harry Potter' to one that critiques the series' lasting impact a mere three days after the final book was released (Apel, 2007). One article compares the journey of a Hogwarts first year to that of a college freshman (Levine, 2000). There are even articles whose authors state outright that they have not read the books nor seen the movies and yet Harry Potter has become so ubiquitous that they know what quidditch is, they know that there is a secret platform at Kings Cross that leads to Hogwarts, and they know Harry Potter is a young orphaned wizard (Hanley, 2007). The focus of study for the Potter books and films includes politics, mythology and lore, the lasting impact on youth who read the books, and the symbols and heroes represented within the story (Beach, 2002) (Black, 2003) (Hallett, 2012) (Barratt, 2012). There seems to be no shortage of themes, ideas, and subjects that can be pulled from the plotline of Harry Potter.

3. Methodology

The methodologies utilized to locate pertinent information were primarily site visits and online electronic research. These were done in two different stages. The first stage was comprised of site visits around the United Kingdom, particularly in London. The second stage was done from the United States and used scholarly databases available at Cook Library at the University of Southern Mississippi as well as the online collections of the British Library including relevant books found within the British Library's collection.

By searching the collection of the British Library online, useful items and articles related to Harry Potter or J.K. Rowling were identified, then located in the collection of the University of Southern Mississippi. The search was expanded to include articles in popular as well as scholarly journals, as useful and pertinent information could be found in both types of sources.

Site visits were done for many locations associated with the Harry Potter films and books and author J.K. Rowling. The majority of sites were related to production of the films; however, there were a few that relate solely to the books and one that combines the magic of both mediums. It is recognizable from the books and the movies and this site, of course, is Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ at Kings Cross Station in London. The sites were located through online research as well as onsite exploration of London during a British Studies study-abroad course.

4. Results

Research Question 1. What collections in the United Kingdom contain materials related to the author and what resources do they contain?

There are two main collections in the United Kingdom that specifically relate to the Harry Potter series: the British Library, a scholarly source for books and manuscripts and the Warner Bros Studios at Leavesden, a popular culture source for sets and other materials used in the films. There are many places and shops throughout the United Kingdom that sell Harry Potter merchandise but these cannot be considered collections because they are not centers containing series and author specific information but rather simply items that can be found anywhere that relate to the series.

British Library

The British Library in London contains a copy of every book published within the United Kingdom, so it contains an extensive collection of books, articles and resources pertaining to the Harry Potter series and its author, J.K. Rowling. At one point the library held an exhibition that showcased several of the hand-written Harry Potter manuscripts (British Library, 2012). These unpublished manuscripts seem to be closely guarded by Rowling and are not widely distributed (Parker, 2012). There are over ninety different items available at the British Library that pertain to J.K. Rowling herself, and a vast number more that relate to the books and the movies.

Leavesden

The Warner Bros Studio at Leavesden contains the greatest collection of Harry Potter materials available. A big benefit to this collection is not just the sheer amount of materials they have, from costumes and props to blue prints and animatronics, but that it is authentic, straight from the films. The studio also has a website (<http://www.wbstudiotour.co.uk/>) where users can take virtual tours of the studio and learn many interesting facts about props, costumes, and sets that were used in the films. Many of these items and sets were saved and reused throughout the filming of the series. 'As the books were still being released while the films were being made, the production crew saved many of the iconic sets, props, and costumes that were created especially for the films- just in case they were ever needed later in the series' (WB Studio Tour, 2014). It is an incredible collection to still have at the end of filming. Overall, the Warner Bros Studio Tour: The Making of Harry Potter is the most comprehensive collection available of original sets, props, costumes, and related materials.

Research Question 2. What sites in the United Kingdom are related to the author and the series and in what manner?

There are many sites throughout the United Kingdom that relate to author J.K. Rowling, as well as to the Harry Potter books and movies, but it seems there are more sites pertaining to the movies than the books. There are numerous tour agencies and companies that run Harry Potter tours around London and around

the United Kingdom and there are websites that include self-guided tours for fans. The following sites that are key and iconic to the series were visited and documented for this study.

Edinburgh

Edinburgh is the place where the book series and Rowling have the most history. In particular, the most relevant spots are the site where the first book began and the site where the last one was finished, the Elephant House Coffee Shop and the Balmoral Hotel respectively. J.K. Rowling lived in Edinburgh while writing the series and still currently lives in Edinburgh in a seventeenth century home (Parker, 2012). This city in Scotland has become famous and the destination for many looking to see the place where the story began and where it was finished.

Elephant House

The Elephant House is a café and coffee shop in Edinburgh where Rowling began to write the first Harry Potter book, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (the American version was revised to *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*). The shop has become a site of pilgrimage for many fans, and the shop encourages them. There is a sign, as shown in Figure 2, posted in the front windows reminding passersby that this was the place where the magic began, the 'Birthplace of Harry Potter'. As a testament to the novels, fans who have come to the shop have graffitied the ladies' washroom with quotations and spells from the books and movies. The walls are so covered it is difficult to read much of what is written (Figure 3). The site is key to the creation of the books; it is where they started and fans want to pay homage to that. Fans want to see the place where Rowling took shelter and hand-wrote the beginnings of the story (Saltman, 2002). And the shop itself seems to be quite content promoting itself as such, the place where the story began, a wonderful stop for a pilgrimage of Harry Potter sites.



Figure 2. The Elephant House, Edinburgh, U.K.



**Figure 3. Harry Potter graffiti walls,
Ladies' Washroom, Elephant House**

Balmoral Hotel

The Edinburgh Balmoral Hotel, a classy upscale hotel, is the location where Rowling finished writing the seventh and final book in the Harry Potter series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. According to *The Telegraph* (2008), the room in which Rowling finished the series has been renamed the J.K. Rowling Suite. Also in the room is a bust of Hermes that Rowling reportedly signed after completing the final installment of the series. Because Balmoral is still a functioning hotel and does not wish to have tourists running amok, the suite is not for view except for a paying overnight guest, the cost of which is almost one thousand pounds per night (Johnson, 2008). At this point in her life, Rowling no longer needed to shelter somewhere to write her books but as the final installment in the famous series, those last pages - the ending of the story - were so important that like many writers, she secluded herself to complete the final chapters. The Balmoral Hotel is an interesting site for any Potter scholar or fan, but it does not allow visitors other than paying guests to view the suite where Rowling stayed but only the exterior and public areas such as the lobby (Figure 4).



Figure 4. The Balmoral Hotel where J.K. Rowling wrote the last Harry Potter book

Oxford: University of Oxford Bodleian Library

The Bodleian Library has a long and rich history, dating back to the fourteenth century. The building has a distinct architecture and beautiful stone detailing and it has been used in several films and television series, such as *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, and *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. The historic Duke Humphrey's Library was portrayed as Hogwarts Library and the University of Oxford Divinity School was the Hogwarts Infirmary in the films (Bodleian, 2014).

Oxford: University of Oxford Christ Church

Christ Church is a college in Oxford whose Great Dining Hall was the inspiration for the Great Hall in the Harry Potter movies. 'Many of the scenes in the Harry Potter feature films are shot in various locations of the College' (Christ Church, 2011). It is easy to see why - the dining hall of the College has dark vaulted ceilings and tall windows that stretch upwards toward the ceiling that in the movies looks like the night sky (Figure 5). 'Harry looked upward and saw a velvety black ceiling dotted with stars. He heard Hermione whisper, 'It's bewitched to look like the sky outside. I read about it in *Hogwarts: A History*' (Rowling, 1997). Even the tables that run the length of the chamber are reminiscent of the Hogwarts house tables. 'They walked out of the chamber, back across the hall, and through a pair of double doors into the Great Hall' (Rowling, 1997).

'Harry had never even imagined such a strange and splendid place. It was lit by thousands and thousands of candles that were floating in midair over four long tables, where the students were sitting. These tables were laid with glittering golden plates and goblets. At the top of the hall was another long table where the teachers were sitting' (Rowling, 1997).

The staircase that leads up to the doors of the Great Hall is a sixteenth century staircase outside the doors to the Great Dining Hall at Christ Church (Figure 6). The iconic spot where Professor McGonagall stood to greet the arriving first year students in Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone (Christ Church, 2011).

Of the two sites, the staircase and Great Dining Hall at Christ Church are the ones that most scholars and fans would recognize. It takes the eye a little longer to notice and recognize the Bodleian ceiling and architecture from the films. It seems the Bodleian does not advertise their involvement in the films as much as Christ Church and both were fascinating sites to see and explore.



**Figure 5. Great Dining Hall,
University of Oxford Christ Church**

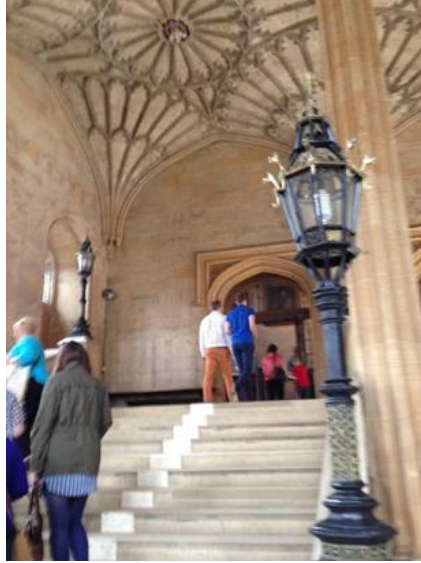


Figure 6. Grand Staircase leading to The Great Dining Hall, Christ Church

London

London itself seems to be a site for Harry Potter, and throughout the series features and locations throughout London are mentioned and used at the set or background for the movies or the books. Kings Cross Station where the Hogwarts Express leaves from every year on September 1st, is in London. Millennium Bridge, iconic for its destruction by the Death Eaters in a scene from *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, is a pedestrian footbridge that stretches across the Thames River from near the Globe Theater to near St. Paul's Cathedral.

The Leaky Cauldron, access point for Diagon Alley, is set in an historic old area of London, only seen by those in the wizarding world:

‘This is,’ said Hagrid, coming to a halt, ‘the Leaky Cauldron. It’s a famous place’. It was a tiny, grubby-looking pub. If Hagrid hadn’t pointed it out, Harry wouldn’t have noticed it was there. The people hurrying by didn’t glance at it. Their eyes slid from the big book shop on one side to the record shop on the other as if they couldn’t see the Leaky Cauldron at all. In fact, Harry had the most peculiar feeling that only he and Hagrid could see it. (Rowling, 1997)

London: Kings Cross Station

Kings Cross is a train and tube station in middle of the city of London. It holds a great deal of history for the author and is one key location in the series that readers and viewers alike can always find. The popularity of the site became so great that Kings Cross station built (and then relocated) the iconic Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ within the station so that tourists and fans could head off to Hogwarts themselves. The Platform is characterized and identified by the large sign attached to the wall that reads Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ and the trolley cart, loaded with trunks and a snowy white owl in a cage, that is already halfway through the wall, because after all ‘All you have to do is walk straight at the barrier between platforms nine and ten’ (Rowling, 1997). Next door is a Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ Shop that has employees at the iconic platform to take photographs of those who imagine themselves pushing through to the platform where the Hogwarts Express waits. They provide scarves in the colors of the four Hogwarts houses so fans can show their house spirit while heading off to school (Figure 7).

While the platform had existed for at least seven years prior, in March 2012, it was moved to its current, and permanent, location on the Western Departures Concourse (*Huffington Post*, 2012). The site is an important one to the series, both book and film, because it is where Harry first meets Ron and sets off on his journey to Hogwarts. While fans cannot actually go there, the shop has some consolation prizes, such as wands, apparel from each house, souvenirs from Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$, jewelry, books, movies, toys, stuffed animals, and more (www.harrypotterplatform934.com).



Figure 7. Mary Dugan, Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$, Kings Cross Station, London

London: Millennium Bridge

Iconic Millennium Bridge in London was featured in one of the eight Harry Potter movies, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. The scene involving the bridge was its virtual destruction by the Death Eaters, in which the bridge was ripped apart and collapsed into the Thames River below. In the books, the bridge that was destroyed was not given a name, although it was said to have been a motor bridge. Indeed, when walking across the bridge, tourists can be heard muttering that this was the bridge from the Harry Potter movies (Figure 8).



**Figure 8. Millennium Bridge, London,
Stretches across the Thames River**

Leavesden

Perhaps the most important site of all is located a short train ride outside the the city of London - the Warner Bros Studio at Leavesden. This studio is the location where the films were made and it is a mecca for Harry Potter fans.

Get on the train at Euston station, take it out to Watford Junction, get off and look for the big, purple, double-decker bus emblazoned with the faces of heroes. It comes from the Warner Bros Studios at Leavesden, the studio where the Harry Potter films were created. The bus is covered with images of the famous actors and actresses that portray the characters, Harry's face stares out as people climb onto the bus to watch a short film on the way to see where all the magic

was created and brought to life. When first walking in, it is the Great Hall that greets the visitors. From the Great Hall, the crowd moves on to see the costume and make-up sections, then the sets. There is the set for Dumbledore's office, Gryffindor Common Room and boy's dormitory, the Burrow, Hagrid's hut, Snape's Dungeon, the Ministry of Magic, Umbridge's office, and many more. The sets are littered with costumes and props from the films.

Outside, there are several more sets, and two concession stands where the weary wanderer can buy butterbeer. The sets outside include a giant chessboard, Tom Riddle's gravestone, the Potter's destroyed house, the Knight Bus, Number Four Privet Drive, and the wooden bridge that is part of Hogwarts. Inside the next building is the Creature Shop, Diagon Alley, the concept models for the sets, and the complete scale model of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. After exiting the room there is the large gift shop where replicas of many of the props can be found and a plethora of other apparel and Harry Potter items.

5. Conclusion

As the Harry Potter series by author J.K. Rowling, took off in the late 1990s, it was with no expectations that the series would become the worldwide phenomenon that it did. Locations throughout the United Kingdom became tourist attractions because of their relationship with the novels and films. The entire film studio warehouse morphed into an experience made for fans to see how the stories began and where they ended up. Studying popular culture such as the Harry Potter series is becoming a more common research topic and knowing what collections that are Harry Potter specific can aid in that effort. The story of one eleven-year old boy has become such an icon of popular culture that it is only fitting scholars investigate how, why and what else the story means other than being a wonderfully and masterfully written book. The books, the movies, and the story itself will continue to be loved and studied because as author J.K. Rowling said,

‘The stories we love best
do live in us forever, so whether you
come back by page or by the big screen,
Hogwarts will always be there
to welcome you home’.

~ J.K. Rowling ~

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