

**Harry Potter and the King's Cross(Over):  
How London's King's Cross Station Became a Platform for Wizarding Tourism**

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ANTH E-1062: Selling Paradise: Tourism and its Objects

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November 11, 2020

"We are in King's Cross, you say?  
 I think that if you decided not to go back,  
 you would be able to...let's say...board a train."  
 "And where would it take me?"  
 "On," said Dumbledore simply.  
 - Albus Dumbledore and Harry Potter, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*

The *Harry Potter* series is, to many people, a fantastical tale chronicling a young boy's remarkable new life in the wizarding world, which includes its fair share of light-hearted and terrifying moments. However, as one begins to closely analyze J. K. Rowling's seven-book narrative, extraordinary crossovers between the Muggle and wizarding realms become apparent; bridging the gap between what we think is real and what we believe to be a fantasy. As a result of this, personal imaginations are brought to life well beyond the books or the silver screen, allowing fans to utilize everyday liminal spaces as newly formed high-traffic tourist destinations. For instance, London's King's Cross station is by all standards a century's old locomotive terminal, mainly used for people to get from one landing place to another; yet, it is hardly considered to be *the* destination for commuters and travelers alike. That was until the *Harry Potter* series. The sensational boom of Platform Nine and Three Quarters situated at King's Cross station became known as the sole way for young witches and wizards to transport themselves from the mundane to the magical — to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Indeed, seemingly overnight, King's Cross station went from a transportation bore to a tourist's score, offering fans from across the globe the prospect of breaching the brick and finding the Hogwarts Express. Due to this newfound wizarding cognitive creativity, the *Harry Potter* series has generated a cultural shift within our world; simultaneously using the popularity of the novels to transport fans to commonplace environments for embodied experiences which teeter between

the wizarding and Muggle sphere. Consequently, the series and the locations involved dually become the imagined destination, reshaping our lens on how one's fantasies encircling a potential premise may grow into a prominent fandom lodestar. As Albus Dumbledore once said, “Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?” (Rowling, 2007). Although King’s Cross station is merely one example of this fan-based phenomenon, the immediate success of the *Harry Potter* series imposed great change upon the terminal; fashioning Potter specific stops and shops for wannabe wizards to enjoy. While travelers and tourists know Platform Nine and Three Quarters is a fictional space, the imaginaries behind the famous brick serve as an elusive reminder that the Harry Potter series stretches well into our every day lives; turning this age-old train station into a flourishing tourist destination.

Unveiled in 1852, King’s Cross station became London’s premier steam locomotive terminus; transporting people and products well into the nineteenth century and beyond.

Although the functionality surrounding the station was based upon modern-day transportation across the United Kingdom, the grounds itself have been famed since AD 597. Traditional folklore claims the location of today’s King’s Cross station was also the “Legendary battle site between Queen Boudicca and Roman invaders,” as historians allege the final resting place of Queen Boudicca,

the warrior queen of the Iceni, is underneath Platform Nine at King’s Cross station



Figure 1. Gregory Olney. Retrieved 2020. King’s Cross station postcard.

(kingscross.uk, n.d.). While the tale behind King's Cross terminal is riddled with mystery and awe, its official title materialized after a statue of King George IV was constructed but quickly removed in 1842 after vast public mockery. Yet, the name, 'King's Cross' prevailed. Due to this rich cultural history, King's Cross station became a unique fixture within the city of London, carving a pathway of souvenirs along the way. As displayed in Figures 1 and 2, King's Cross postcards became en vogue in the early twentieth century; dually showcasing its large terminal and steam trains that adorned the timeworn tracks. Understanding the lure encircling King's Cross' yesteryears, marketing for the station skyrocketed as commuters and tourists bought these



Figure 2. Gregory Olney. Retrieved 2020. King's Cross station postcard.

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posted items to display their travels along their journey. Standard photography at that time was still considered to be a luxury for some, however, postcards made this easy souvenir or gift accessible to all. Because of this modern form of gift-giving or personal collection, King's Cross postcards served two purposes — to exhibit one's worldly travels

and to share such an experience inside the

distinguished terminus with the receiver. The excitement around these postcards made traveling attainable for all, and during a time when finances were of great importance, the term, 'Wish You Were Here!' also created sightseeing aspiration for others to visit the station. And still, King's Cross station has branded its own life-cycle and served its purpose for many reasons besides the steam locomotives. Its latest endeavor serves as a global destination for *Harry Potter* fans and

curious tourists; adding yet another impressive and highly unanticipated effect to its tenured performance.

First published in 1997, the United Kingdom became the epicenter for *Harry Potter*'s rise to fame; shattering all expectations and instantly topping worldwide best-sellers lists for children's literature novels. Above all, the earliest response for the Potter craze began with the pages throughout *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, however, London-based fans had the privilege of having King's Cross station in their backyard for immediate performance use. The terminus throughout the series is the focal point for young witches and wizards to leave the human (or Muggle) reality and enter the wizarding realm. This is done by running directly

between Platforms Nine and Ten, where a wizard-only portal, Platform Nine and Three Quarters, unveils itself.

Unaware of this experience, Harry Potter innocently asks a King's Cross terminus worker, "Excuse me, sir, can you tell me where I might find Platform Nine and Three Quarters?" — displaying just how different this experience is for the untrained wizard (Rowling, 2001).

From that moment on, fans flocked to King's Cross station to encounter the same bit of excitement and wonder they once found in the books; showcasing how

the series had spawned into an embodied experience for some. Now, over two decades later, King's Cross terminal

has become a full-fledged tourist stopping place, offering



Figure 3. Miraphora Mina & Eduardo Lima. Retrieved 2020.  
Platform 9 3/4 postcard.

several Potter-centric fun for fans of all ages. The official King's Cross website boasts, "Look out for a luggage trolley embedded in the wall, and make-believe that you are off to start your magical school journey," while giving fans the opportunity to have a professional photographer take their photo at this famed tourist hotspot ([kingscross.uk/harrypottersplatform93/4](http://kingscross.uk/harrypottersplatform93/4), n.d.). The terminus also offers an exclusive *Harry Potter* shop which was, "styled to resemble Ollivander's wand emporium," offering exclusive Platform Nine and Three Quarters souvenirs akin to Figure 3; a limited edition signed postcard for £139.00.

While gifts like the postcard shown in Figure 3 (among hundreds of other King's Cross exclusive souvenirs) may not be the sole reason fans flock to this station, it does create a sense of allure or desire aside from the personified trolley occurrence. *Harry Potter* enthusiasts are no stranger to buying overpriced commercial gifts for themselves or others, and the signed postcard shown in Figure 3 is just one example of how far the Potterverse will go to obtain the full Platform Nine and Three Quarters experience. A similar sensation occurred during the terminal's early days (displayed in Figures 1 and 2), as steam locomotives were the modern way to travel. This new-age experience was a viaduct for people from all walks of life to mentally crave and hold hope their next excursion would involve this advanced traveling technology. Granted, the terminus's overall functionality from its yesteryears may vary from what it was spawned to be, King's Cross station continues to have an appeal for commuters and travelers. Although the meaning behind the terminal's thrill has altered from a new-age contemporary terminal to a *Harry Potter* landing place, the station's functional and social revitalization maintains its foundation around the people who use the terminal, whether that's for commuter use or tourist pleasure.

Lastly, concerning King's Cross's 'regional identity' (Eddy, 2020), it's crucial to note that while the distinctiveness of the station has historically changed, its United Kingdom identity has remained the same. The significance of the station's overall function (displayed in Figures 1 and 2) shows its importance for the region historically with respect to technology and travel. On the other hand, the terminus's newfound *Harry Potter* glory also appeases this zonal sameness, considering the *Harry Potter* series is primarily based between London and Hogwarts. Similar to King's Cross's beginnings (where eager travelers waited for their chance to ride a locomotive for the first time), *Harry Potter* fans are equally passionate to visit London for this hyper-geographical experience. Potter fans know there is only one King's Cross station — there's only one Platform Nine and Three Quarters. With that in mind, such a consensus alone frames the perfect tourist experience, one that can only exist at King's Cross station. The original keenness travelers sought throughout the nineteenth century persists today, merely showing itself through different forms of tourist performance. This shape of embodied crossovers continues to flourish decades later; originating via the lens of modernized agog travelers, to its latest *Harry Potter* inclusion. King's Cross's encompassing purpose has not changed as much as one would presume; as it maintains to be a space for people to travel from one place to another, whether that be in the Muggle or wizarding realm. Additionally, the motivation behind sharing such an experience (through the means of postcards and photography) has proven to remain a focal point for visitors, regardless of the era. While one may gaze upon these three postcards and merely understand it's the same place, these souvenirs display a deeper social connection to the terminal's identity; showing how influential King's Cross station continues to be.

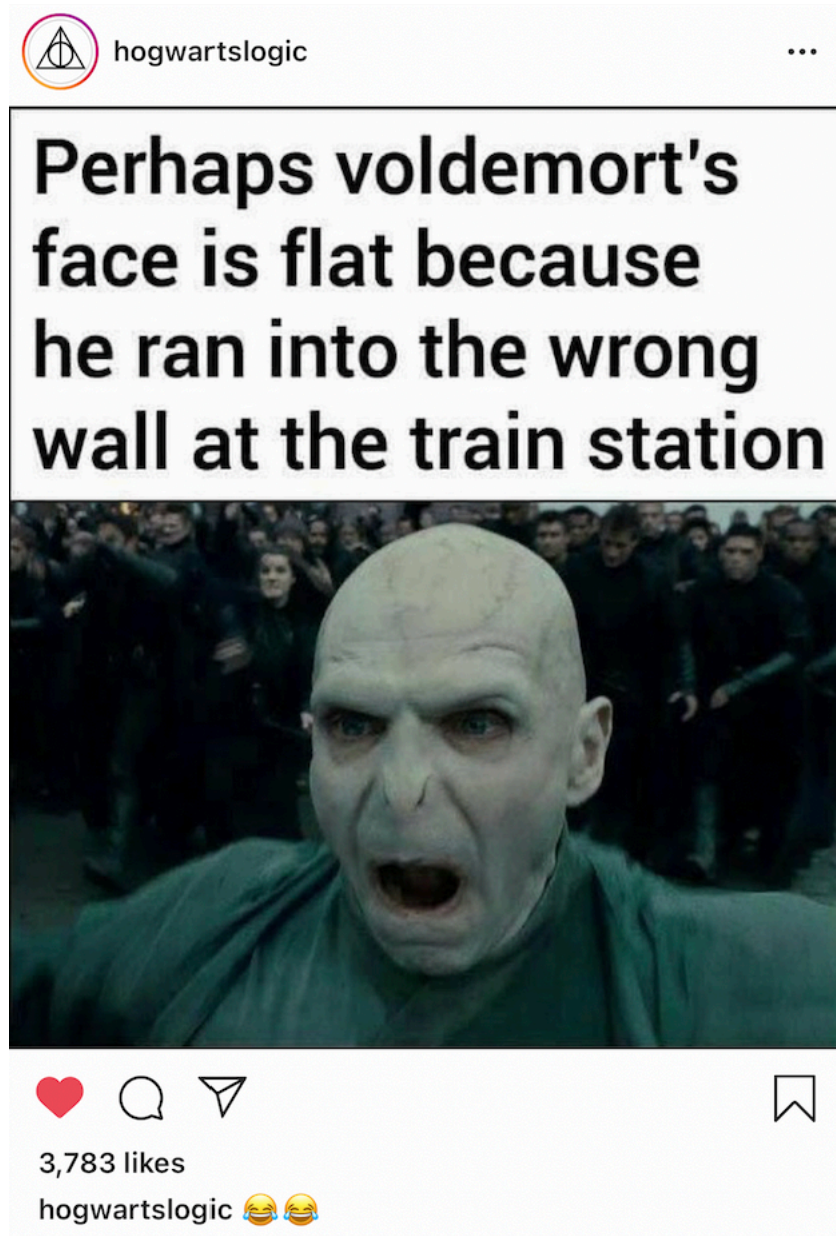
To conclude, on the exterior, King's Cross station is a liminal space used for specific transportation reasons, yet, its recently established place in *Harry Potter* history has illuminated the interior by allocating a lived experience through the fantasy of Platform Nine and Three Quarters. The rich history King's Cross has instituted for itself and the greater region has been detected since its grand opening in 1852; continuously granting travelers the opportunity to journey into a new space and possibly a new time. By doing so, King's Cross station remains an elusive structure and will always be the sole crossover between the Muggle and wizarding world; granting unique access to few for the trip of a lifetime. Although these postcards display brief moments in time relating to the station and its historical occasions, the broader image exhibits a much grander picture. After all this time, this veteran train station has bloomed into the world's only terminal offering a one-of-a-kind *Harry Potter* affair; or as some may view it, a one-way ticket to Hogwarts!



## References

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## Additional Images



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