

# A Guide for NonBrits Writing Harry Potter Fanfics

By Pinky Brown

*(twenty-seven attempts and Ffnet still won't let me underline the bloody title!)*

I wrote this about two years ago in response to several requests from non-British readers for me to "Brit-check" their work. Unfortunately I had to say no, as my own work takes up almost all of my time, but it did start me thinking about the idea of publishing a guide to British English, specifically aimed at Harry Potter fanfiction writers.

I also discussed the idea with a couple of American online friends in the HP fandom, and both of them were very enthusiastic about it. However, I never got round to publishing it, mainly because I rather expected to receive a deluge of angry emails from people who had misunderstood the point of it. I have only decided to publish it now after a complaint from a reader about my "poor spelling" - e.g: "realise", "colour", etc. Actually, there's absolutely nothing wrong with my spelling; she was just unaware that British spelling often differs from American spelling. I was horrified at the idea that any of my other readers might also think the same, especially as I care far too much about my writing to allow any errors, whether of spelling or canon or plot, and that's what made me think about publishing this again.

Firstly, some unarguable facts:

The *Harry Potter* books were written by a British author, are set in Britain, and feature British characters speaking British English.

When the books were published in the US by Scholastic, the books "corrected" British spelling and phrases for American readers, which I personally find appalling. If I were reading an American book, I would expect it to feature American spelling and phrases, and not to feel the need to "correct" or change them in order to placate my English sensibilities. Besides, half the joy of reading a book set in a different place or culture is to discover all those little idiosyncrasies of language, wonderful little phrases or slang. Certainly with the HP books, part of the joy for all readers, whatever nationality, is the delight that JK Rowling takes in language: I give you the Crumple-horned Snorkack, Expecto Patronum, Alohamora, Daedalus Diggle, Knockturn Alley, etc.

See the link at the end for a list of the frighteningly numerous changes made by Scholastic to the original texts. This does not include changes to spelling, of which there are too many to list. If you can, do try and get hold of the original UK versions of the books - why would you want to read a bastardised version of a much-loved text when the original version is available? Just go to Amazon and keyword *Harry Potter Bloomsbury*.

I do want to make it clear that this essay is *not* aimed solely at Americans, but since it is the case that the vast majority of HP fanfiction is *written* by Americans, it will inevitably mostly apply to them. Plus, of course, it's only the Scholastic versions of the books published in America that changed the original text - the Canadian and Australian editions did not.

Some writers clearly try to make their stories and characters seem British, others do not bother. I've never really understood this: if you care about your writing, wouldn't you at least try to make sure it is the best you can make it? However, even the best fanfiction writers can make errors when setting a story in a country other than their own. As one of the minority of fanfiction writers who are actually British, I can *always* tell if a story is written by a non-Brit. I'm sure the same is true of Brits who attempt to write, say, *CSI: Miami* fanfics ("*You wanker!*" shouted Horatio, as he slowly removed his sunglasses. Hmm, I'm almost tempted to write that story...)

Anyway, I hope that those of you who also write fanfiction find this useful or, if not, at least illuminating or amusing. I wanted it to be an enjoyable read in itself and not a dry, academic lecture. And, entirely selfishly, I also hope that it might result in at least a couple more stories published that don't immediately make me want to press the back-button or poke out my own eyes.

All of the following have been read by me in HP fanfiction. I suffered so you don't have to!

Pinky Brown, September 2009

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### **Part One: Really Basic Howlers:**

*All of these will instantly make me press the back-button as it smacks of laziness and/or that the writer just doesn't care about making their story in any way authentic:*

**Mum**, not Mom!

**Trousers**, not pants! Pants in the UK are underpants, not trousers. It's also a mildly amusing word to use when something is a bit crap. "How was the film?" "It was a bit pants, to be honest."

**Autumn**, not Fall!

**Pavement**, not sidewalk!

**Holiday**, not vacation!

No-one in Britain *ever* says "**gotten**", as in "You've gotten really good at that" or "Hermione had gotten up early that morning". This one gets my goat so much that whenever I see it used it ruins the story for me and I have to immediately press the back button. It's almost up there with the nickname "Mione" for making me instantly stop reading a story. Where did that come from, by the way? And why the hell do so many people seem to use it as though it's actually canon? And that brings me neatly on to...

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## **Part Two: Lies I Learnt From Fan-fiction:**

*Much in the same way that nearly all of the scenes I have read in which Ron & Hermione or Harry & Ginny have sex for the first time are practically identikit, and thus I can only conclude have been written by people who've read a lot of fanfiction themselves, there are some words and phrases that only ever seem to occur in Fanfiction:*

**Nutters:** Clearly, a lot of people borrow this stuff from other fanfiction, because I can't think of any other reason this would appear so frequently. It certainly doesn't appear in any of the books. This is PLURAL. You might say, for example, that "that Slytherin lot are a bunch of nutters". You would never say that *one person* was "completely nutters", or that Ron's mum "went nutters". You would say that she went "nuts". Or, to use the word "nutter" in its proper context: "That Moody's a nutter." "That bloke's a nutter."

The misuse of the word "**right**" as an intensifier. Hagrid uses this, but in modern Britain no-one of Harry's age ever would. Some of this may stem from that horrible line from GoF (no doubt written by the HP screenwriter, film-ruiner and Ron-hater Steve Kloves, who I despise more with the release of each new film); "You're a right foul git, you know that?"

No-one in Britain of any age has EVER used those three words together. I appreciate that they can't use proper swearwords but almost anything would have been better than this entirely made-up phrase. It just sounds wrong – because it is. "You're a git" would have worked on its own, even "You're a right git". But "right foul git" is just *horrible*.

You might use it in conjunction with another insult as an intensifier: "You're a right git", "That Malfoy's a right idiot", "Ron's bedroom was a right mess". But I have seen it used almost randomly: "We had a right good time." (not unless you were a Cornish farmer in the 1940s) "That was a right nice meal." Again, any of these phrases sound fine when coming from Hagrid's mouth, and completely wrong coming from Ron's, or Fred's, or Harry's, or Neville's. If in doubt, leave it out.

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### **Part Three: Spelling:**

*British English has many words that are spelled differently from American English (see link at end of essay for further examples). Obviously, this is a fairly minor infraction and one that certainly isn't going to stop me reading a story. It's really here so non-Brits reading stories by British writers can understand that the following are not spelling **mistakes**, merely **differences** in spelling.*

*Notable examples:*

**Grey** not gray: "Lupin's hair was thin and greying." "Ron had gone a funny grey colour."

**Colour** not color

**Humour** not humor

**Neighbour** not neighbor

**Favourite** not favorite

**Realise** not realize - the general rule with British English is that if a word ends with "-ise" it is spelled with an "s" and not a "z".

**Centre** not center

**Tyres** with a "y", not tires with an "i"

**Cosy**, not cozy

**Moustache**, not mustache

**Pyjamas** not pajamas (let's call the whole thing off!)

**Cheque**, not check

**Mould**, not mold

**Programme** not program - "Ron's joining the Auror programme" "I saw it on a television programme"

**Metres**, not meters/ **kilometres** not kilometers/ **centimetres** not centimeters

**Theatre**, not theater

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#### **Part Four: Lost In Translation:**

*Thanks to Scholastic, there's now a whole generation of Americans who think that Brits eat candy and wear pants outside.*

**Rubbish**, not trash

**Rubbish bin**, not trash can

**Sweets**, not candy

**Maths**, not Math

**Secondary school**, not High School (although some schools are starting to adopt the latter phrase, annoyingly)

**Football**, and never *ever* soccer

**Insects**, not bugs

**Skip**, not dumpster

**Term**, not semester

**Snigger**, not snicker

**Jumper**, not sweater. Unless it's made of sweatshirt material, in which case it's a sweatshirt. Again, this is the fault of Scholastic, who translated "Weasley jumper" into "Weasley sweater". (*Note: I have since been told that, in America, a jumper is what we in the UK know as a pinafore dress, which is why it was changed. I still maintain that keeping the original word would make readers think, "Well, it can't be a dress, so it must mean something else over there." How hard would it have been to have included a small glossary at the end of the book?)*)

**Car**, not automobile

**Boot**, not trunk

**Bumper**, not fender

**Bonnet**, not hood

**Petrol**, not gas

**Car park**, not parking lot

**Motorway**, not freeway

**Estate agent**, not real estate agent (we don't use the term real estate at all)

**Charity shop**, not thrift store

**Sweet shop**, not candy store

**Shop**, not store generally, in fact

**Shopping centre**, not shopping mall or mall

**Queue**, not line

A **takeaway**, not takeout or carry-out

**Mobile phone**, not cellphone or cell (usually shortened to just "**mobile**")

**Tanned**, not tan: "Hermione was looking really tan after her holiday." No!

**Flat**, not apartment

**Flatmate** or housemate, not roommate (unless you're at one of the older universities and are literally sharing a room with another student: this is very rare though and doesn't happen at the vast majority of UK universities, where you would either be in halls (of residence) for the first year, or more likely, in a shared student house. When I was in university I didn't know a single person who was or had been in halls.)

**Bath**, not tub

**Wardrobe** (or cupboard), not closet

**Bedside table**, not night stand

**Jumble sale**, not yard sale (and we don't have bake sales)

**Curtains**, not drapes

**Lessons**, not classes

**Zip**, not zipper

**Semi-detached**, not duplex

**Love bites**, not hickeys

**Bogeys** or **bogies**, not boogers

**Jelly**, not Jell-o

**Jam**, not jelly

**Hospital**, not infirmary

**Tin**, not can. Tin of beans, not can of beans. Tinned peas not canned peas. A can usually contains drink. Can of beer or can of coke.

Pyjama **trousers** or pyjama **bottoms**, not pyjama pants. Similarly tracksuit trousers or tracksuit bottoms.

**Bathrobe**, not just robe. Or dressing gown if it's something you throw on over your pyjamas when it's cold.

**Nappies**, not diapers

**Pushchair** or pram, not stroller.

We call it a **fringe**, not bangs. The term "bangs" to describe a hairstyle is meaningless over here. A short bobbed haircut would be called a bob, much the same as over there (I've read my F Scott Fitzgerald!)

**Trainers**, not sneakers

**Vest**, not tank.

**Normality**, and never ever ever normalcy. Absolute dead giveaway, this one (and a horrible word).

**Crisps**, not (potato) chips

**Chips**, not fries. What you call French fries, we call chips. Although it kind of pains me to say that, as really a French fry is not a proper chip, it's one of those feeble pale long skinny "chips" you get in McDonalds. A proper British chip is fatter and shorter and squarer and crispier and has more than a passing resemblance to something that was once a potato.

Women's underpants are universally referred to in Britain as **knickers**, not panties. Sometimes pants, but absolutely never "panties". Over here that has a kind of sleazy connotation, the sort of word that might be used by a middle aged man looking at pictures of schoolgirls on the internet. Men's pants are just pants.

**Biscuits**, not cookies. We do have cookies, but they are a very specific type of biscuit, usually with chocolate chips in them. Biscuit is the generic word. And we certainly don't have any tradition of "milk and cookies" before bedtime, as seems to happen in a lot of American books I've read. We have no tradition of eating cookie dough, either.

A "**purse**" over here is just something you keep your money in, the women's equivalent of a wallet or pocketbook, and *not* a handbag. A handbag is a handbag. The two are entirely different things. Hermione would never say, "Can you get my wand from my purse?" Her wand would be in her handbag, or just her bag. Her purse would only contain money, or, you know, flat things like stamps.

**Arse**, not Ass

**Arsehole**, not asshole

In the UK, **pissed** doesn't mean angry, it means drunk. ("I was so pissed last night I puked all over Harry's shoes")

**Pissed off** means angry. ("I'm really pissed off at you for puking over my shoes." It can also be used as generic swearword, ("Oh, piss!"), and most commonly, to tell someone to go away: ("Piss off, Malfoy!")

And we don't use "pissy" to mean angry or uptight. (Or in any other sense, in fact. In the UK, it's not a word.)

**Bum** means arse (or ass, if you must) over here, not layabout or homeless person. ("Ron tried his best not to look at Hermione's bum.")

Similarly a **tramp** is a homeless (often drunk) old man, not a slutty woman. ("Mundungus's clothes were so dirty he looked like a tramp.")

In Britain a **fag** is a cigarette. ("God, I really need a fag!" "Can you get me some fags?" "I'm down to my last fag.") No one uses it to mean homosexual. Gay is the universal word.

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### **Part Five: Things The English Never Say:**

*Now, before you protest, I am NOT being patronising here, I'm merely pointing out that if I were to write a story set in, say, Milwaukee, I would not have one of my characters say "Bloody Hell". Or a story set in 16th century France where a character uses the phrase "Blimey, I was completely trolleyed last night!"*



*And yet I have read hundreds of HP fics where a character says "Shoot!" or "Gee" or "Jeez"; all phrases that no English person has ever uttered, except in irony. Every single one of the following phrases has been spotted in an HP fic published on this very site.*

*Note: When I say that "no-one" uses these phrases, obviously I don't include thirteen year olds, who, thanks to the internet and TV, now use the same slang the world over. Including, almost certainly, in Mogadishu. Of course, thirteen year old wizards, who don't have access to TV and the internet, would not.*

No-one says "you **guys**" as in "I'll catch up with you guys later, alright?" or "Guys! Wait up!" They might use it when specifically talking about a group of men or boys, but they would be much more likely to use *blokes*. "I'm going out with the guys tonight" is about the only context it is used.

Come to think of it, no-one says "**Wait up!**" either. We'd just say, "Wait!"

No-one says "**I guess**", as in "Are you feeling better now?" "I guess."

No-one says "**I'm done**" or "Are you done?" "Have you finished?" "I've finished."

No-one says "**Quit it**" or "Quit shouting". We only really use it in the quitting your job sense.

No-one says "**Shoot!**" as in "Shoot, I left the iron on!" We just use the actual swear word. (That would be "Shit")

No one uses the phrase "**peachy**". No-one.

We don't use "**mad**" to mean angry. We don't say "I was so mad at you", or "he was really mad at me", for annoyed. "I was so annoyed *with* you", or "he was really pissed off with me", or "I was really angry with you the other day." Mad over here means "driven crazy", as it "Ron's snoring is driving me mad!" or that something is rather odd or peculiar: "Have you seen those mad earrings Luna's wearing?"

We don't say "**me either**" - the phrase we use is "me neither"

We don't use the phrase "in a **snit**" to indicate someone is annoyed about something.

We don't say "**Don't you?**" as in, "You've really got balls, don't you?" "*Haven't you?*" is what we would say.

"I'll **sic** mum on you" – absolutely no one ever uses this phrase. In fact, I've only ever seen it used in fanfiction.

No-one really says "**sure**", as in, "Do you want to go and sit down?" "Sure!"

No-one says "**for sure**" either.

We don't say "**nuh-huh**" as in "Did you finish your essay yet?" Nuh-huh."

No-one says "**a bunch of**", as in "We went to Hogsmeade a bunch of times last year." Unless it's a bunch of bananas, of course. Or grapes. That really is the only context in which this phrase might be used.

And no-one ever says, at least without heavy irony, "**Have a nice day!**"

No-one in the UK ever uses the phrase "**Chopped liver**", as in, "And what am I? Chopped liver?" – with the possible exception of about thirty people in Golders Green (a Jewish area of North London). Does it sound like something you can imagine one of the cast of *Friends* saying? Yes? Then don't use it! Seriously, I actually read a fanfic in which Hermione used this phrase, and I didn't know whether to laugh or stab my own eyes out with a knitting needle.

Similarly, no-one says "already" as in "**Shut up already!**" or "Will you clean your room already!" The Jewish population of Britain has always been a very small minority (about 280,000 at time of writing), and thus Jewish phrases have generally not become incorporated into wider spoken English to the same degree.

**Swearing:** No one says "Jeez" – we would just say "Jesus". Britain is a considerably more secular society than America, so most people would have no problem would using the words "Jesus" or "Christ" as swear words. I recently received an email from a reader who complained about the number of times Ron uses the words "Jesus" and "Christ" in my story *Six Foot of Ginger Idiot*, but not because she was offended by the swearing. Because she thought that Ron, as a non-religious person, wouldn't use these words. The idea of them being used as swear words and having nothing whatsoever to do with religion had somehow bypassed her completely. I suppose the thing is that here, we use these words every day and just don't think about them. I'm not religious and neither are any of my friends, and yet we use these words all the time. I had Ron use them because he hangs around with other teenagers (cough Seamus cough) who almost certainly do, and he'd pick them up. That's what teenagers *do*; they try to sound like their friends whether consciously or unconsciously, because they want to be accepted.

**"It's not that big of a deal"** – *No-one* says this in the UK. For a start, it's doesn't make grammatical sense! (Grrr!) "It's not that big a deal" would be correct. I see this all the time in fanfiction, and it takes all my willpower not to immediately press the back button, so much does it annoy me. Sometimes I don't even resist.

No-one says "**anyways**" – it's not plural! Another one that makes me immediately press the back-button.

We don't say "**Gee**" or "**Gee Whizz**"

No-one uses the word "much" in this context: "**Paranoid, much?**"

We don't say "you're **mean**" or "that's just mean". We use mean mostly to indicate stingy with money.

No one uses the word "**Say**", as in "Say, Hermione, where are my shoes?" No-one!

No-one says "**I'm pumped**" or "**I'm stoked**" to indicate they are pleased about something.

We don't say "**Sheesh!**" in exclamation.

We don't say "it **grosses** me out" or refer to something as "gross".

We never say that something "**bugs**" us or someone is "bugging" us.

We don't say "**suck it up**". What does this even *mean*?

We never say "**happy holidays!**" when we really mean "Happy Christmas!"

A **bank note** is called a note not a bill (five pound note, ten pound note, etc).

Or, more commonly, people use the slang words for these: **fiver** or **tenner**.

For *pound* the slang word is "**quid**": "Sorry, I can't come out for a pint; I've only got a couple of quid on me."

We don't say "**write me**", we say "write *to* me"

No-one says "I'm **bummed**" or "I'm bummed out". Mainly because "bumming" is schoolboy slang for gay sex. Ahem.

No-one says "**go figure**".

We never use the word "**snuck**", as in "Ron snuck into Hermione's bedroom".

We don't say "**let's eat!**"

We don't say "**Ew!**", as in "*Ew, gross!*"

No-one in the UK ever says "**holy crap**"

No one says "*it's **real nice***" or "*that's real bad*". They say "*it's really nice*" or "*that's really bad*". This one is a dead giveaway that you are American, and makes your supposedly English characters sound as though they are in *The OC* (or, since I wrote this two years ago and that show's now been cancelled, *Gossip Girl*).

We don't use the word **mussed**, as in "her hair was all mussed up"

I gather, purely from reading fanfiction, that a "**Sharpie**" is some sort of marker pen. The fact that I hadn't a clue what it was beforehand should indicate that it is something we do not have in Britain, and thus should not be included in your story. *(Note: I have since been informed that, as of 2006, we now have Sharpies in Britain. However, as that person also pointed out, it doesn't make them any less anachronistic in an HP story! We also wouldn't use the brand name as a generic term in the same way we do with Hoover and Biro)*

Similarly, another American brand we don't have over here: "Spanx" - over here we just call them **control pants**, Magic knickers, or Bridget Jones knickers. A little bit of research before including *any* brand names should do the trick here. I mean, I wouldn't write a story set in New York where one of my characters popped to Greggs the bakers for a Cornish pasty (a little in-joke there for any Brits reading this).

We don't use "**barfing**" to mean vomiting. There are a million very fine Brit expressions for puking which you can see by following the link to the peevish website at the end of this essay.

No-one **scoots**. "Ron scooted up to sit beside her." No no no!

We call it the sea or the seaside, not the **ocean**. Mainly because unless you live on the North coast of Cornwall, or the North West coast of Scotland, which are on the Atlantic, the sea around Britain *isn't* the ocean - it's the Irish Sea, or the North Sea, or the English Channel.

We don't use the terms "**fooling around**" or "**making out**". "Getting off with" is the most used term. "Sue got off with some bloke at the party last night." "Why don't you try getting off with McLaggen?" (the latter being the *actual line* that JK Rowling wrote, *not* "Why don't you try hooking up with McLaggen?"). No-one in Britain has ever **hooked up** with anyone else! If Scholastic hadn't seen fit to change it, you would already know this!)

"**Getting off with**", by the way (the "**with**" is crucial), doesn't have the same meaning as *getting off* does in the States. It just means snogging, and probably a bit of over the clothes touching. You might even do a bit of *under* the clothes touching, but the clothes would definitely stay *on*.

No-one uses the expression "**whipped**" to mean a man who is under the thumb of his wife/ girlfriend.

We don't say we are **waiting on** something or someone, we say we are waiting *for* someone

No-one ever says "**my bad**". I've read this a hundred times and I still don't really know what it means. Suffice to say it is not ever used in British English!

A **couple days** later, a **couple feet** away. NO! A couple OF days later, a couple OF Feet away!

Football **match** not football *game*, similarly Quidditch match, not Quidditch game

No-one calls their grandmother **Grammy** or their grandfather Gramps. British versions: Nan, Nana, Nanny, Gran, Grandma, Granny, Granddad, Grandpa.

We don't have such a thing as a "**vanity**" (or if we do, we call it something else). I think that what people might be referring to is a "dressing table". Whatever it's called, women keep their make-up, jewellery and perfume on it.

We don't use the word "**antsy**" to mean angry or irritable. We don't use it at all, in fact.

We occasionally say "**movie**" but more generally we use "film". However, we would never say "Do you want to go and **catch** a movie?" We would be more likely to say, "Do you want to go and **see** a film?"

We generally use "**going out with**" rather than "dating". "Ron is going out with Hermione", not "Ron is dating Hermione", or "Are you going out with anyone at the moment?" rather than "Are you dating?"

We don't call it a couch, we call it a **sofa**, or occasionally, a settee. *Never* a couch.

A **cot** is something babies sleep in, not, as it seems to be in the US, a camp bed.

We don't call it a back yard, we call it a **garden**, even if it's just a strip of concrete. If it *is* a strip of concrete, it's often referred to as a patio instead. Similarly, we don't use the phrase "yard work". Gardening or D.I.Y would apply.

We don't use the word **butt** when we mean arse. We don't say "butt out" either. *Cigarette butt* is about the only context in which we ever use this.

No-one uses **period** to either mean "full stop" (that little dot that indicates the end of a sentence), or to indicate firmness on something. We only use it to refer to a period of time, or, more usually, menstruation. Hence every time some character in an American film says, "I'm just not doing it. Period." - we all giggle behind our hands.

On a similar theme, we generally call it **PMT** (pre-menstrual tension) not PMS.

I've been told that in the States, a "**cow**" specifically means a *fat* woman. Over here it's never used in that context, it's just a generic insult for a woman - "stupid cow", "fat cow", "that utter cow Pansy Parkinson", etc.

We don't say swimsuit or bathing suit, we say **swimming costume**, or bikini, or (swimming) trunks. NEVER "swim trunks".

We don't use "bathroom" as a euphemism for toilet. If we say bathroom we mean a room with a bath in it. British words for **toilet**: toilet or loo (not "John", "can" or "restroom"!)

Although we do drink orange/ apple/pineapple/pumpkin **juice** etc, we don't use the generic word "juice", as in "Would you like some juice?" We would always specify which type of juice is being offered: "Would you like some apple or orange juice?"

We don't call Christmas "**the holiday season**" as in those dreadful cinema adverts promoting some awful tosh featuring Vince Vaughn in an elf costume: "This holiday season, Jack is about to discover that blah blah zzz..." It's just Christmas. Full stop.

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### **Part Six: Things The English Never Do:**

We don't eat **macaroni cheese** (well, vegetarians do, but there's no tradition of cooking it at home, probably because there's not a huge Italian community in the UK).

We don't eat **meatloaf**. Ever.

We don't eat **pancakes** for breakfast, either. With maple syrup or without. There are some trendy cafes that do pancakes, but it would be an unusual breakfast item, not a common one. And when we do eat pancakes (on Pancake Day, natch) they tend to be more like the thin European *crepes* than thick American variety.

We don't have **candy canes** at Christmas.

We don't have **pumpkin pie** at Halloween or Thanksgiving. Mainly because we don't have Thanksgiving! (I know, it sounds obvious, but I've actually seen it in HP fics!). We also don't make so much of a big thing about Halloween either. What we do celebrate in a major way is Bonfire Night aka Guy Fawkes Night, on 5th November. See the link at the end if you want to know more.

*Note on Bonfire Night:* While it is true that children from wizarding families would not celebrate Bonfire Night, Muggle-born and Half-Blood children certainly would.

Also, as most towns and villages have their own public events with a big bonfire and fireworks, I imagine it to be something that a lot of wizards would have gone to anyway - who doesn't like fireworks? Certainly I can see Molly taking the Weasley kids to the big (free!) Bonfire Night celebrations that are held every year in the Devon town of Ottery St Mary (surely just up the road from Ottery St Catchpole!)

In the UK (also in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Hong Kong & some other Commonwealth countries), the day after Christmas Day is also a holiday, called **Boxing Day**. The reason why is slightly lost in the mists of time\*, but basically it's when you all sit around bloated from the vast amount of food you consumed the day before, surrounded by the empty boxes your presents came wrapped in, and can't manage anything more energetic than falling asleep in front of *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*, which seems to be on the telly every Boxing Day without fail. Or, increasingly these days, you go and buy cheap shit you didn't want when it was full price in the sales.

\* Yes, I do know the various theories, please don't write in!

Nobody in England has worn an "undershirt" (by which I mean a **vest** or a sleeveless t-shirt worn under a collared shirt) since about 1961, unless they're about eighty. Younger men might wear a t-shirt under their shirt either in colder weather, or for that whole layered skate-punk look, but they would just call it a t-shirt, it wouldn't have a special name. And they'd never wear a vest (which I understand Americans call "tanks") a la Ryan from *The OC*. Unless they were a gay bodybuilder going clubbing. So definitely not Ron or Harry or any of the other young male characters from the books. By the way, vests are never known as "wifebeaters".

**Original character names:** In the last few years in the UK there's been a trend for (mainly teenage, working-class) mums to give their kids American-sounding and often entirely made-up names, but this is something that a nice middle-class girl like Hermione would never do in a million years. Generally the rule for British names is, "If it sounds like a surname, don't use it as a first name." That goes for boys as well as girls. I once read an (otherwise excellent) fic where Ron and Hermione had a third child and named him Landon. *Landon!* Hermione would rather drown her kid at birth than give it an American-sounding name like Taylor, Tyler, Madison, Blake, Paige, Jordan or Landon. (Especially since she gave her second child such a stereotypically posh-boy name like *Hugo*. How she got that one past Ron is beyond me...)

Working-class girls think that giving their child a name they've heard used in an American TV series or by an American celebrity is *glamorous*. Middle-class girls (or, more usually, women) think quite the opposite. I imagine the same thing is true the world over.

We don't (with the occasional exception) live in houses with **basements**. And if we did we wouldn't use them as "dens" or stick a pool table in there. Generally, with houses large enough to have a basement, each floor including the basement have all been converted into separate flats, or a well-off middle class family lives there and converts it into a very nice kitchen-diner with a glass roof.

I have never known any English child or teenager to have their own **en-suite** bathroom! Until the last few years even adults didn't have en-suites, unless they were very, very rich. Thanks largely to the spate of property-porn TV programmes over the last 15 years, an ensuite bathroom for at least the "master" bedroom seems to now be something everyone wants.

Almost nobody in the UK lives in a house with a **porch** – at least, what we mean by porch is a little lean-to attached to the front, or more likely, back door, and usually just big enough to store a pair of wellies in. Not open to the elements and big enough to store a swing. I've never ever seen a house in the UK with a porch swing. Or a verandah. England is a small country and there are very few detached houses. Also, that particular style of house is not really endemic to Britain.

We don't have **Girl Scouts** (or by extension, Girl Scout Cookies). We have Brownies, or Guides. There are some girls in the Scouts, but it's still a majority boy activity. And they wouldn't be called Girl Scouts, just Scouts.

We don't have **coolers** or **ice-makers**. The weather's not hot enough!

We generally use **miles** rather than kilometres for measures of distance, especially when driving. In the rest of Europe, though, they use kilometres.

We also *always* use **feet** for a person's height rather than centimetres. "Christ, Ron, you really are six foot of ginger idiot", "Bill was a strapping lad of six foot two".

We also use **stones** for a person's weight rather than kilogrammes. "Lavender had put on half a stone since she'd split up with Ron." "Charlie was a rather chunky man of sixteen stone."



When buying fruit and vegetables and making cakes and pies we generally use **pounds and ounces**, despite European legislation that outlawed this in favour of grammes for several years and was largely roundly ignored. "Molly's pastry recipe required half a pound of butter." "Can I have a pound of tomatoes, please?" The law was repealed recently.

British **secondary schools** don't have graduation ceremonies (universities do, however), and they absolutely do not have Proms, Prom Queens, yearbooks, jocks, or votes as to who is most likely to succeed. Although, horrifyingly, this kind of thing has started to be introduced over the last few years. Thank God I didn't have to go through all that when I was at school. We might occasionally have had a "school disco" once or twice during our secondary school life, but as one of the uncool kids, I mostly managed to avoid these. Plus, every American high school film I've ever watched has given the impression that, unless you're really popular, Prom is something to be dreaded, endured, and then later looked back on as one of the undisputed low points of your miserable life, probably whilst lying on a psychiatrist's couch and weeping.

British universities don't have **sorority** or **fraternity** houses (again, thank the merciful Jesus!)

**Weddings**: no-one in the UK "stands up for" the bride and groom, they are the best man or the maid of honour (that's honour with a u, mind), or a bridesmaid.

Neither do we have bachelor or bachelorette parties. We have **stag** or **hen** nights (or increasingly, stag or hen week/ends, which are just an excuse to drink a lot of beer/wine and desecrate the historic centre of a medieval European city)

And when we're pregnant we don't have **baby showers** in the UK. Or bridal showers. For God's sake, it costs enough to go to the hen night and the bloody wedding, without paying for all that other shit too. Again, though, this is another insidious American tradition that is starting to sneak in and will no doubt be par for the course in the next few years.

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### **Part Seven: A Note On Tea:**

**Tea** in England means the drink, but it also means a meal that you have around teatime, i.e: 4 or 5 o'clock. So "what's for tea?" could mean sandwiches, or cakes and tea, or a salad, or a full hot meal, it's more the time you have it that makes it tea.

If it's in the evening proper, then it's dinner (Unless you live in the North, but that's a whole other essay!)

It is a cliché that the English are obsessed with tea, but it is also *true*. I know maybe two people who don't drink tea and they are definitely treated as curiosities! A couple of readers queried whether (in my story *Biscuits*) a 14 year old Ron would be drinking tea rather than pumpkin juice or, say, lemonade. This prompted me to question my friends about their own memories of tea and we all, without exception, remembered starting to drink tea from about the age of twelve. Before that it would have been lemonade or orange squash. Certainly by the time I was in my mid-teens it was entirely normal to sit around drinking tea with my friends, or to order tea before any other drink in a cafe.

If a visitor comes to your house, you ask them if they want a cup of tea before they've even taken their coat off. If you come home from work or school or the shops the very first thing a British person does is to put the kettle on. Tea is the lifeblood of the nation.

From anthropologist Kate Fox's book *Watching the English*:

*Tea is still believed, by English people of all classes, to have miraculous properties. A cup of tea can cure, or at least alleviate, almost all minor physical ailments and indispositions, from a headache to a scraped knee.*

*Tea is also an essential remedy for all social and psychological ills, from a bruised ego to the trauma of a divorce or bereavement. This magical drink can be used effectively as a sedative or stimulant, to calm and soothe or to revive and invigorate. Whatever your mental and physical state, what you need is 'a nice cup of tea'.*

I couldn't have put it better myself!

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*Author's Note:*

*Well, I hope you found that helpful and if not, at least enjoyable to read, and that I don't need to go into hiding under an assumed name.*

*Here are some websites you might find interesting if you'd like to explore the subject further (bloody Ffnet won't let me post links, I'm afraid):*

*For a list of differences between the British and American versions of the books, go to Google and type in **HP Lexicon differences***

*For an overall summation of the differences between British and American spelling, go to Wikipedia and type in **American and British spelling differences***

*Once you're on Wikipedia you could also type in **Guy Fawkes Night, fish and chips** or **Boxing Day**.*

*And finally, for a truly epic and enlightening (not to mention completely filthy!) online encyclopaedia of British slang, go to Google and type in **peevish** - it's the first site that comes up.*

*Right, I'm off to put the kettle on!*

*Pinky Brown, September 20th 2009*