

Harry Potter

POTTERMORE



HALLOWEEN
RELEASES

Azkaban

Azkaban has existed since the fifteenth century and was not originally a prison at all. The island in the North Sea upon which the first fortress was built never appeared on any map, Muggle or wizarding, and is believed to have been created, or enlarged, by magical means.

The fortress upon it was originally home to a little-known sorcerer who called himself Ekrizdis. Evidently extremely powerful, but of unknown nationality, Ekrizdis, who is believed to have been insane, was a practitioner of the worst kinds of Dark Arts. Alone in the middle of the ocean, he lured, tortured and killed Muggle sailors, apparently for pleasure, and only when he died, and the concealment charms he had cast faded away, did the Ministry of Magic realise that either island or building existed. Those who entered to investigate refused afterwards to talk of what they had found inside, but the least frightening part of it was that the place was infested with Dementors.

Many in authority thought Azkaban an evil place that was best destroyed. Others were afraid of what might happen to the Dementors infesting the building if they deprived them of their home. The creatures were already strong and impossible to kill; many feared a horrible revenge if they took away a habitat where they appeared to thrive. The very walls of the building seemed steeped in misery and pain, and the Dementors were determined to cling to it. Experts who had studied buildings built with and around Dark magic contended that Azkaban might wreak its own revenge upon anybody attempting to destroy it. The fortress was therefore left abandoned for many years, a home to continually breeding Dementors.

Once the International Statute of Secrecy had been imposed, the Ministry of Magic felt that the small wizarding prisons that existed up and down the country in various towns and villages posed a security risk, because attempts by incarcerated witches and wizards to break out often led to undesirable bangs, smells and light shows. A purpose-built prison, located

on some remote Hebridean island, was preferred, and plans had been drawn up when Damocles Rowle became Minister for Magic.

Rowle was an authoritarian who had risen to power on an anti-Muggle agenda, capitalising on the anger felt by much of the wizarding community at being forced to go underground. Sadistic by nature, Rowle scrapped the plans for the new prison at once and insisted on using Azkaban. He claimed that the Dementors living there were an advantage: they could be harnessed as guards, saving the Ministry time, trouble and expense.

In spite of opposition from many wizards, among them experts on both Dementors and buildings with Azkaban's kind of Dark history, Rowle carried out his plan and soon a steady trickle of prisoners had been placed there. None ever emerged. If they were not mad and dangerous before being placed in Azkaban, they swiftly became so.

Rowle was succeeded by Perseus Parkinson, who was likewise pro-Azkaban. By the time that Eldritch Diggory took over as Minister for Magic, the prison had been operating for fifteen years. There had been no breakouts and no breaches of security. The new prison seemed to be working well. It was only when Diggory went to visit that he realised exactly what conditions inside were like. Prisoners were mostly insane and a graveyard had been established to accommodate those that died of despair.

Back in London, Diggory established a committee to explore alternatives to Azkaban, or at least to remove the Dementors as guards. Experts explained to him that the only reason the Dementors were (mostly) confined to the island was that they were being provided with a constant supply of souls on which to feed. If deprived of prisoners, they were likely to abandon the prison and head for the mainland.

This advice notwithstanding, Diggory had been so horrified by what he had seen inside Azkaban that he pressed the committee to find alternatives.

Before they could reach any decision, however, Diggory caught dragon pox and died. From that time until the advent of Kingsley Shacklebolt, no Minister ever seriously considered closing Azkaban. They turned a blind eye to the inhumane conditions inside the fortress, permitted it to be magically enlarged and expanded and rarely visited, due to the awful effects of entering a building populated by thousands of Dementors. Most justified their attitude by pointing to the prison's perfect record at keeping prisoners locked up.

Nearly three centuries passed before that record was broken. A young man was successfully smuggled out of the prison when his visiting mother exchanged places with him, something that the blind and loveless Dementors could not detect and would have never expected. This escape was followed by another, still more ingenious and impressive, when Sirius Black managed to evade the Dementors single-handed.

The weakness of the prison was demonstrated amply over the next few years, when two mass breakouts occurred, both involving Death Eaters. By this time the Dementors had given their allegiance to Lord Voldemort, who could guarantee them scope and freedom hitherto un-tasted. Albus Dumbledore was one who had long disapproved of the use of Dementors as guards, not only because of the inhumane treatment of the prisoners in their power, but because he foresaw the possible shift in loyalties of such Dark creatures.

Under Kingsley Shacklebolt, Azkaban was purged of Dementors. While it remains in use as a prison, the guards are now Aurors, who are regularly rotated from the mainland. There has been no breakout since this new system was introduced.

J.K. Rowling's thoughts

The name 'Azkaban' derives from a mixture of the prison 'Alcatraz', which is its closest Muggle equivalent, being set on an island, and 'Abaddon', which is a Hebrew word meaning 'place of destruction' or 'depths of hell'.

Dolores Jane Umbridge

Birthday: 26th August
Wand: Birch and dragon heartstring, eight inches long
Hogwarts house: Slytherin
Special abilities: Her punishment quill is of her own invention
Parentage: Muggle mother, wizard father
Family: Unmarried, no children
Hobbies: Collecting the 'Frolicsome Feline' ornamental plate range, adding flounces to fabric and frills to stationary objects, inventing instruments of torture

Dolores Jane Umbridge was the eldest child and only daughter of Orford Umbridge, a wizard, and Ellen Cracknell, a Muggle, who also had a Squib son. Dolores's parents were unhappily married, and Dolores secretly despised both of them: Orford for his lack of ambition (he had never been promoted, and worked in the Department of Magical Maintenance at the Ministry of Magic), and her mother, Ellen, for her flightiness, untidiness, and Muggle lineage. Both Orford and his daughter blamed Ellen for Dolores's brother's lack of magical ability, with the result that when Dolores was fifteen, the family split down the middle, Orford and Dolores remaining together, and Ellen vanishing back into the Muggle world with her son. Dolores never saw her mother or brother again, never spoke of either of them, and henceforth pretended to all she met that she was a pure-blood.

An accomplished witch, Dolores joined the Ministry of Magic directly after she left Hogwarts, taking a job as a lowly intern in the Improper Use of Magic Office. Even at seventeen, Dolores was judgemental, prejudiced and sadistic, although her conscientious attitude, her saccharine manner towards her superiors, and the ruthlessness and stealth with which she took credit for other people's work soon gained her advancement. Before she was thirty, Dolores had been promoted to Head of the office, and it was but a short step from there to ever more senior positions in the management of

the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. By this time, she had persuaded her father to take early retirement, and by making him a small financial allowance, she ensured that he dropped quietly out of sight. Whenever she was asked (usually by workmates who did not like her) 'are you related to that Umbridge who used to mop the floors here?' she would smile her sweetest, laugh, and deny any connection whatsoever, claiming that her deceased father had been a distinguished member of the Wizengamot. Nasty things tended to happen to people who asked about Orford, or anything that Dolores did not like talking about, and people who wanted to remain on her good side pretended to believe her version of her ancestry.

In spite of her best efforts to secure the affections of one of her superiors (she never cared particularly which of them it was, but knew that her own status and security would be advanced with a powerful husband), Dolores never succeeded in marrying. While they valued her hard work and ambition, those who got to know her best found it difficult to like her very much. After a glass of sweet sherry, Dolores was always prone to spout very uncharitable views, and even those who were anti-Muggle found themselves shocked by some of Dolores's suggestions, behind closed doors, of the treatment that the non-magical community deserved.

As she grew older and harder, and rose higher within the Ministry, Dolores's taste in little girlish accessories grew more and more pronounced; her office became a place of frills and furbelows, and she liked anything decorated with kittens (though found the real thing inconveniently messy). As the Minister for Magic Cornelius Fudge became increasingly anxious and paranoid that Albus Dumbledore had ambitions to supersede him, Dolores managed to claw her way to the very heart of power, by stoking both Fudge's vanity and his fears, and presenting herself as one of the few he could trust.

Dolores's appointment as Inquisitor at Hogwarts gave full scope, for the first time in her life, for her prejudices and her cruelty. She had not enjoyed her time at school, where she had been overlooked for all positions of

responsibility, and she relished the chance to return and wield power over those who had not (as she saw it) given her her due.

Dolores has what amounts to a phobia of beings that are not quite, or wholly, human. Her distaste for the half-giant Hagrid, and her terror of centaurs, reveal a terror of the unknown and the wild. She is an immensely controlling person, and all who challenge her authority and world-view must, in her opinion, be punished. She actively enjoys subjugating and humiliating others, and except in their declared allegiances, there is little to choose between her and Bellatrix Lestrange.

Dolores's time at Hogwarts ended disastrously, because she overreached the remit Fudge had given her, stepping outside the bounds of her own authority, carried away with a fanatical sense of self-purpose. Shaken but unrepentant after a catastrophic end to her Hogwarts career, she returned to a Ministry which had been plunged into turmoil due to the return of Lord Voldemort.

In the change of regimes that followed Fudge's forced resignation, Dolores was able to slip back into her former position at the Ministry. The new Minister, Rufus Scrimgeour, had more immediate problems pressing in on him than Dolores Umbridge. Scrimgeour was later punished for this oversight, because the fact that the Ministry had never punished Dolores for her many abuses of power seemed to Harry Potter to reveal both its complacency and its carelessness. Harry considered Dolores's continuing employment, and the lack of any repercussions for her behaviour at Hogwarts, a sign of the Ministry's essential corruption, and refused to cooperate with the new Minister because of it (Dolores is the only person, other than Lord Voldemort, to leave a permanent physical scar on Harry, having forced him to cut the words 'I must not tell lies' on the back of his own hand during detention).

Dolores was soon enjoying life at the Ministry more than ever. When the Ministry was taken over by the puppet Minister Pius Thicknesse, and

infiltrated by the Dark Lord's followers, Dolores was in her true element at last. Correctly judged, by senior Death Eaters, to have much more in common with them than she ever had with Albus Dumbledore, she not only retained her post but was given extra authority, becoming Head of the Muggle-born Registration Commission, which was in effect a kangaroo court that imprisoned all Muggle-borns on the basis that they had 'stolen' their wands and their magic.

It was as she sat in judgement of another innocent woman that Harry Potter finally attacked Dolores in the very heart of the Ministry, and stole from her the Horcrux she had unwittingly been wearing.

With the fall of Lord Voldemort, Dolores Umbridge was put on trial for her enthusiastic co-operation with his regime, and convicted of the torture, imprisonment and deaths of several people (some of the innocent Muggle-borns she sentenced to Azkaban did not survive their ordeal).

J.K. Rowling's thoughts

Once, long ago, I took instruction in a certain skill or subject (I am being vague as vague can be, for reasons that are about to become obvious), and in doing so, came into contact with a teacher or instructor whom I disliked intensely on sight.

The woman in question returned my antipathy with interest. Why we took against each other so instantly, heartily and (on my side, at least) irrationally, I honestly cannot say. What sticks in my mind is her pronounced taste for twee accessories. I particularly recall a tiny little plastic bow slide, pale lemon in colour that she wore in her short curly hair. I used to stare at that little slide, which would have been appropriate to a girl of three, as though it was some kind of repellant physical growth. She was quite a stocky woman, and not in the first flush of youth, and her tendency to wear frills where (I felt) frills had no business to be, and to carry undersized handbags, again as though they had been borrowed from a child's dressing-up box,

jarred, I felt, with a personality that I found the reverse of sweet, innocent and ingenuous.

I am always a little wary when talking about these kinds of sources of inspiration, because it is infuriating to hear yourself misinterpreted in ways that can cause other people a great deal of hurt. This woman was NOT 'the real Dolores Umbridge'. She did not look like a toad, she was never sadistic or vicious to me or anyone else, and I never heard her express a single view in common with Umbridge (indeed, I never knew her well enough to know much about her views or preferences, which makes my dislike of her even less justifiable). However, it is true to say that I borrowed from her, then grossly exaggerated, a taste for the sickly sweet and girlish in dress, and it was that tiny little pale lemon plastic bow that I was remembering when I perched the fly-like ornament on Dolores Umbridge's head.

I have noticed more than once in life that a taste for the ineffably twee can go hand-in-hand with a distinctly uncharitable outlook on the world. I once shared an office with a woman who had covered the wall space behind her desk with pictures of fluffy kitties; she was the most bigoted, spiteful champion of the death penalty with whom it has ever been my misfortune to share a kettle. A love of all things saccharine often seems present where there is a lack of real warmth or charity.

So Dolores, who is one of the characters for whom I feel purest dislike, became an amalgam of traits taken from these, and a variety of sources. Her desire to control, to punish and to inflict pain, all in the name of law and order, are, I think, every bit as reprehensible as Lord Voldemort's unvarnished espousal of evil.

Umbridge's names were carefully chosen. 'Dolores' means sorrow, something she undoubtedly inflicts on all around her. 'Umbridge' is a play on 'umbrage' from the British expression 'to take umbrage', meaning offence. Dolores is offended by any challenge to her limited world-view; I felt her surname conveyed the pettiness and rigidity of her character. It is harder to

explain 'Jane'; it simply felt rather smug and neat between her other two names.

Ministers for Magic

The Ministry of Magic was formally established in 1707 with the appointment of the very first man to hold the title 'Minister for Magic', Ulick Gamp.* The Minister for Magic is democratically elected, although there have been times of crisis in which the post has simply been offered to an individual without a public vote (Albus Dumbledore was made such an offer, and turned it down repeatedly). There is no fixed limit to a Minister's term of office, but he or she is obliged to hold regular elections at a maximum interval of seven years. Ministers for Magic tend to last much longer than Muggle ministers. Generally speaking, and despite many a moan and grumble, their community is behind them in a way that is rarely seen in the Muggle world. This is perhaps due to a feeling, on the part of wizards, that unless they are seen to manage themselves competently, the Muggles might try to interfere.

The Muggle Prime Minister has no part in appointing the Minister for Magic, whose election is a matter only for the magical community themselves. All matters relating to the magical community in Britain are managed solely by the Minister for Magic, and he has sole jurisdiction over his Ministry. Emergency visits to the Muggle Prime Minister by the Minister for Magic are announced by a portrait of Ulick Gamp (first Minister for Magic) that hangs in the Muggle Prime Minister's study in number 10 Downing Street.

No Muggle Prime Minister has ever set foot in the Ministry of Magic, for reasons most succinctly summed up by ex-Minister Dugald McPhail (term of office 1858-1865): 'their puir wee braines couldnae cope wi' it.'

A list of minister for magic, with their terms of office:

Ulick Gamp 1707 - 1718

Previously head of the Wizengamot, Gamp had the onerous job of policing a fractious and frightened community adjusting to the imposition of the International Statute of Secrecy. His greatest legacy was to found the Department of Magical Law Enforcement.

Damocles Rowle 1718 - 1726

Rowle was elected on a platform of being 'tough on Muggles'. Censured by the International Confederation of Wizards, he was eventually forced to step down.

Perseus Parkinson 1726 - 1733

Attempted to pass a bill making it illegal to marry a Muggle. Misread the public mood; the wizarding community, tired of anti-Muggle sentiment and wanting peace, voted him out at the first opportunity.

Eldritch Diggory 1733 - 1747

Popular Minister who first established an Auror recruitment programme. Died in office (dragon pox).

Albert Boot 1747 - 1752

Likeable, but inept. Resigned after a mismanaged goblin rebellion.

Basil Flack 1752 - 1752

Shortest serving Minister. Lasted two months; resigned after the goblins joined forces with werewolves.

Hesphaestus Gore 1752 - 1770

Gore was one of the earliest Aurors. Successfully put down a number of revolts by magical beings, although historians feel his refusal to contemplate rehabilitation programmes for werewolves ultimately led to more attacks. Renovated and reinforced the prison of Azkaban.

Maximilian Crowdy 1770 - 1781

Father of nine Crowdy was a charismatic leader who routed out several extremist pure-blood groups planning Muggle attacks. His mysterious death in office has been the subject of numerous books and conspiracy theories.

Porteus Knatchbull 1781 - 1789

Was called in confidentially in 1782 by the Muggle Prime Minister of the day, Lord North, to see whether he could help with King George III's emerging mental instability. Word leaked out that Lord North believed in wizards, and he was forced to resign after a motion of no confidence.

Unctuous Osbert 1789 - 1798

Widely seen as too much influenced by pure-bloods of wealth and status.

Artemisia Lufkin 1798 - 1811

First female Minister for Magic. Established Department of International Magical Co-operation and lobbied hard and successfully to have a Quidditch World Cup tournament held in Britain during her term.

Grogan Stump 1811 - 1819

Very popular Minister for Magic, a passionate Quidditch fan (Tutshill Tornados), established Department of Magical Games and Sports and managed to steer through legislation on magical beasts and beings that had long been a source of contention.

Josephina Flint 1819 - 1827

Revealed an unhealthy anti-Muggle bias in office; disliked new Muggle technology such as the telegraph, which she claimed interfered with proper wand function.

Ottaline Gambol 1827 - 1835

A much more forward-looking Minister, Gambol established committees to investigate Muggle brainpower which seemed, during this period of the British Empire, to be greater than some wizards had credited.

Radolphus Lestrange 1835 - 1841

Reactionary who attempted to close down the Department of Mysteries, which ignored him. Eventually resigned due to ill health, which was widely rumoured to be inability to cope with the strains of office.

Hortensia Milliphutt 1841 - 1849

Introduced more legislation than any other sitting Minister, much of it useful, but some wearisome (hat pointiness and so on), which ultimately resulted in her political downfall.

Evangeline Orpington 1849 - 1855

A good friend of Queen Victoria's, who never realised she was a witch, let alone Minister for Magic. Orpington is believed to have intervened magically (and illegally) in the Crimean War.

Priscilla Dupont 1855 - 1858

Conceived an irrational loathing of the Muggle Prime Minister Lord Palmerston, to an extent that caused such trouble (coins turning to frogspawn in his coat pockets, etc.) that she was forced to step down. Ironically, Palmerston was forced to resign by the Muggles two days later.

Dugald McPhail 1858 - 1865

A safe pair of hands. While the Muggle parliament underwent a period of marked upheaval, the Ministry of Magic knew a period of welcome calm.

Faris "Spout-hole" Spavin 1865 - 1903

Longest-ever serving Minister for Magic, and also the most long-winded, he survived an 'assassination attempt' (kicking) from a centaur who resented the punchline of Spavin's infamous 'a centaur, a ghost and a dwarf walk into a bar' joke. Attended Queen Victoria's funeral in an admiral's hat and spats, at which point the Wizengamot suggested gently that it was time he move aside (Spavin was 147 when he left office).

Venusia Crickerly 1903 - 1912

Second ex-Auror to take office and considered both competent and likeable, Crickerly died in a freak gardening accident (mandrake related).

Archer Evermonde 1912 - 1923

In post during the Muggle First World War, Evermonde passed emergency legislation forbidding witches and wizards to get involved, lest they risk mass infractions of the International Statute of Secrecy. Thousands defied him, aiding Muggles where they could.

Lorcan McLaird 1923 - 1925

A gifted wizard, but an unlikely politician, McLaird was an exceptionally taciturn man who preferred to communicate in monosyllables and expressive puffs of smoke that he produced through the end of his wand. Forced from office out of sheer irritation at his eccentricities.

Hector Fawley 1925 - 1939

Undoubtedly voted in because of his marked difference to McLaird, the ebullient and flamboyant Fawley did not take sufficiently seriously the threat presented to the world wizarding community by Gellert Grindelwald. He paid with his job.

Leonard Spencer-Moon 1939 - 1948

A sound Minister who rose through the ranks from being tea-boy in the Department of Magical Accidents and Catastrophes. Oversaw a great period of international wizarding and Muggle conflict. Enjoyed a good working relationship with Winston Churchill.

Wilhelmina Tuft 1948 - 1959

Cheery witch who presided over a period of welcome peace and prosperity. Died in office after discovering, too late, her allergy to Alihotsy-flavoured fudge.

Ignatius Tuft 1959 - 1962

Son of the above. A hard-liner who capitalised on his mother's popularity to gain election. Promised to institute a controversial and dangerous Dementor breeding program and was forced from office.

Nobby Leach 1962 - 1968

First Muggle-born Minister for Magic, his appointment caused consternation among the old (pure-blood) guard, many of whom resigned government posts in protest. Has always denied having anything to do with England's 1966 World Cup Win. Left office after contracting mysterious illness (conspiracy theories abound).

Eugenia Jenkins 1968 - 1975

Jenkins dealt competently with pure-blood riots during Squib Rights marches in the late sixties, but was soon confronted with the first rise of Lord

Voldemort. Jenkins was soon ousted from office as inadequate to the challenge.

Harold Minchum 1975 - 1980

Seen as a hard-liner, he placed even more Dementors around Azkaban, but was unable to contain what looked like Voldemort's unstoppable rise to power.

Millicent Bagnold 1980 - 1990

A highly able Minister. Had to answer to the International Confederation of Wizards for the number of breaches of the International Statute of Secrecy on the day and night following Harry Potter's survival of Lord Voldemort's attack. Acquitted herself magnificently with the now infamous words: 'I assert our inalienable right to party', which drew cheers from all present.

Cornelius Fudge 1990 - 1996

A career politician overly-fond of the old guard. Persistent denial of the continuing threat of Lord Voldemort ultimately cost him his job.

Rufus Scrimgeour 1996 - 1997

The third ex-Auror to gain office, Scrimgeour died in office at the hands of Lord Voldemort.

Pius Thicknesse 1997 - 1998

Omitted from most official records, as he was under the Imperius Curse for his entire term of office, and unconscious of anything that he was doing.

Kingsley Shacklebolt 1998 - present

Oversaw the capture of Death Eaters and Voldemort supporters following the death of Lord Voldemort. Initially named as 'caretaker Minister', Shacklebolt was subsequently elected to the office.

* Prior to 1707, the Wizards' Council was the longest serving (though not the only) body to govern the magical community in Britain. After the imposition of the International Statute of Secrecy in 1692, however, the wizarding community needed a more highly structured, organised and more complex governing structure than they had hitherto used, to support, regulate and communicate with a community in hiding. Only witches and wizards who enjoyed the title of 'Minister for Magic' are included in this entry.

Naming Seers

A very great variety of first names are given to children by their wizard parents, some of them being what we might think of as Muggle names (e.g. James, Harry, Ronald), others giving a distinct flavour of the personality or destiny of the bearer (e.g. Xenophilius, Remus, Alecko).

Some wizards have a family tradition of names. The Black family, for instance, like to name their offspring after stars and constellations (which many would say suits their lofty ambition and pride). Other wizarding families (like the Potters and the Weasleys) simply pick their favourite names for their children, and leave it at that.

A certain sector of magical society, however, follows the ancient wizarding practice of consulting a Naming Seer, who (usually for a hefty payment of gold) will predict the child's future and suggest an appropriate moniker.

This practice is becoming increasingly rare. Many parents prefer to 'let him/her find his/her own way', and dislike (with good reason) receiving premature hints of aptitude, limitations or, at worst, catastrophe. Mothers and fathers have often fretted themselves silly on the way home from the Naming Seer, wishing that they had not heard the Seer's predictions about their child's personality or future.

Sybill Trelawney

Birthday: 9th March
Wand: Hazel and unicorn hair, 9 1/2 inches long, very flexible
Hogwarts house: Ravenclaw
Special abilities: A Seer, though the gift is unpredictable and unconscious
Parentage: Muggle mother, wizard father
Family: Early marriage ended in unforeseen rupture when she refused to adopt the surname 'Higglebottom'. No children
Hobbies: Practising making doom-laden prophecies in front of the mirror, sherry

Sybill is the great-great granddaughter of a genuine Seer, Cassandra Trelawney. Cassandra's gift has been much diluted over ensuing generations, although Sybill has inherited more than she knows. Half-believing in her own fibs about her talent (for she is at least ninety per cent fraud), Sybill has cultivated a dramatic manner and enjoys impressing her more gullible students with predictions of doom and disaster. She is gifted in the fortune teller's tricks; she accurately reads Neville's nervousness and suggestibility in his first class, and tells him he is about to break a cup, which he does. On other occasions, gullible students do her work for her. Professor Trelawney tells Lavender Brown that something she is dreading will happen to her on the sixteenth of October; when Lavender receives news on that day that her pet rabbit has died, she connects it instantly with the prediction. All of Hermione's logic and good sense (Lavender was not dreading the death of the rabbit, which was very young; the rabbit did not die on the sixteenth, but the previous day) are lost: Lavender wants to

believe her unhappiness was foretold. By the law of averages, Professor Trelawney's rapid fire predictions sometimes hit the mark, but most of the time she is full of hot air and self-importance.

Nevertheless, Sybill does experience very rare flashes of genuine clairvoyance, which she can never remember afterwards. She secured her post at Hogwarts because she revealed, during her interview with Dumbledore, that she was the unconscious possessor of important knowledge. Dumbledore gave her sanctuary at the school, partly to protect her, partly in the hope that more genuine predictions would be forthcoming (he had to wait many years for the next).

Conscious of her low status on the staff, who are almost all more talented than she is, Sybill spends most of her time apart from her colleagues, up in her stuffy and overcrowded tower office. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, she has developed an over-reliance on alcohol.

Professors Trelawney and McGonagall are polar opposites; the one something of a charlatan, manipulative and grandiose, the other fiercely intelligent, stern and upright. I knew, however, that when the consummate outsider and non-Hogwartian Dolores Umbridge attempted to oust Sybill from the school, Minerva McGonagall, who has been critical of Trelawney on many occasions, would show the true kindness of her character and rally to her defence. There is a pathos about Professor Trelawney, infuriating though I would find her in real life, and I think that Minerva sensed her underlying feeling of inadequacy.

J.K. Rowling's thoughts

I created detailed histories for many of the Hogwarts staff (such as Albus Dumbledore, Minerva McGonagall and Rubeus Hagrid), some of which were used in the books, and some of which were not. It is in some ways fitting that I only ever had a vague idea of what had happened to the Divination teacher before she washed up at Hogwarts. I imagine that Sybill's pre-Hogwarts existence consisted of drifting through the wizarding world, trying

to trade on her ancestry to secure employment, but scorning any that did not offer what she feels is the status due to a Seer.

I love Cornish surnames, and had never used one until the third book in the series, so that is how Professor Trelawney got her family name. I did not want to call her anything comical, or which suggested chicanery, but something impressive and attractive. 'Trelawney' is a very old name, suggestive of Sybill's over-reliance on her ancestry when seeking to impress. There is a beautiful old Cornish song featuring the name ('The Song of the Western Men'). Sybill's first name is a homonym of 'Sibyl', which was a female clairvoyant in ancient times. My American editor wanted me to use 'Sibyl', but I preferred my version, because while it keeps the reference to the august clairvoyants of old, it is really no more than a variant the unfashionable female name 'Sybil'. Professor Trelawney, I felt, did not really qualify as a 'Sibyl'.

Thestrals

Manifesting as black, skeletal, bat-winged horses, but invisible to all who have never been truly touched by death, Thestrals have a somewhat macabre reputation. In centuries past the sight of them was regarded as unlucky; they have been hunted and ill treated for many years, their true nature (which is kindly and gentle) being widely misunderstood. Thestrals are not marks of ill omen, nor (their spooky appearance notwithstanding) are they in any way threatening to humans, always allowing for the fright that the first sight of them tends to give the observer.

Being able to see Thestrals is a sign that the beholder has witnessed death, and gained an emotional understanding of what death means. It is unsurprising that it took a long time for their significance to be properly understood, because the precise moment when such knowledge dawns varies greatly from person to person. Harry Potter was unable to see Thestrals for years after his mother was killed in front of him, because he

was barely out of babyhood when the murder happened, and he had been unable to comprehend his own loss. Even after the death of Cedric Diggory, weeks elapsed before the full import of death's finality was borne upon him. Only at this point did the Thestrals that pull the carriages from Hogsmeade Station to Hogwarts castle become visible to him. On the other hand, Luna Lovegood, who lost her own mother when she was young, saw Thestrals very soon afterwards because she is intuitive, spiritual and unafraid of the afterlife.

While somewhat intimidating in appearance, these carnivorous horses are emblematic of a journey to another dimension, and reward all who trust them with faithfulness and obedience. Thestrals are native to the British Isles and Ireland, though they have been spotted in parts of France and the Iberian Peninsula; they seem to have an association with wizards who descend from the horse-loving Celtic peoples. Other parts of the world have their own equivalent to Thestrals.