

**'All Souls Trilogy' author visits Petoskey/published June 4th 2015 –
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Witches, vampires, and a secret book called “Ashmole 782.” What do these all have in common?

Each is a key feature in the “All Souls Trilogy,” just out in paperback from New York Times bestselling author Deborah Harkness. Harkness will visit Petoskey on Friday, June 5, the guest of McLean and Eakin Booksellers.

“The Book of Life,” published by Penguin Books, the final installment in Harkness’ trilogy, again takes up the story of Diana Bishop and Matthew Clairmont as the pair travel through time and place, seeking to understand among other mysteries, the enigma of “Ashmole 782.”

The new book opens again in the Auvergne region of France, at Sept-Tours, home of Diana and Matthew. Watching from above is Philippe de Clermont, a vampire who with his “broad shoulders and devilish grin” was “still handsomer than any man had a right to be.” Philippe’s companion is Emily Mather, Diana’s beloved aunt and recently deceased.

Emily’s death troubles those she left behind, none more than Diana, though she is the “historian in the family. She would know where to start and how to string the confusing events into a coherent story.”

Most troubling is that, as of late, “Em had been turning to the higher magics for guidance.” These darker arts figure into her last words: “I know the secret of Ashmole 782 and you will never possess it.”

Diana and Matthew, watched over and aided by Emily and Philippe, strive to reconcile Emily’s death with the wider mystery of Ashmole 782.

This influence of Ashmole 782 keeps all the characters careening through time and trouble for the next 500 pages, in search of answers and understanding.

A real manuscript, Ashmole 782, is missing or misplaced from England’s University of Oxford. The book’s whereabouts and contents are a real mystery, as well as a lynchpin in Harkness’ trilogy.

Harkness says her work as a historian puts her in the right frame of mind to tell such stories. “I am a professional story-teller of sorts,” she says. “I know lots of interesting characters who lived in the past, and I’ve looked back on events that have challenged and inspired those individuals. This means I have wonderful resources to draw on when writing fiction.”

The initial inspiration for the trilogy came from an unlikely opportunity. Harkness says, “an airport bookstore display in Mexico” nudged her to the story.

She saw a wall of books on different kinds of supernatural creatures. “I wondered if they really existed, like the books’ covers suggested, and what on earth did they do for a living and how did they date? The trilogy is the unexpected answer to that question.”

The trilogy’s conclusion means a new book tour for Harkness, who says she appreciates meeting her readers on her visits. “For me, book tours are all about the readers. I really enjoy meeting people who have read the books and hearing first-hand what they liked, what they were puzzled by, and about their experiences with the trilogy,” she says. “Readers are everywhere — even in small towns — and having lived in a few small towns; I know how wonderful they are. It’s a treat to be visiting Petoskey.”

Jessilyn Norcross, co-owner of McLean and Eakin, is thrilled to land Harkness for one of her limited appearances. Petoskey is one of only 15 stops Harkness will make on her tour.

“Readers across the nation have been burning through the pages of ‘The All Soul’s Trilogy’ since its release in 2011,” Norcross says.

“We could hardly keep it on the shelves when the third and final book came out in hardcover. Customers would drop whatever they had in their hands and say, ‘I didn’t know the third one was out’ ... and rush to the counter clutching it tightly before rushing straight out to read it.”

Norcross says the adulation is understandable. “This is historical fiction at its most playful and mysterious,” she explains of the series. “(Ashmole 782) has grown in myth over time and many believe it holds the answers to some of man’s metaphysical and astrological questions about the origin of mystic beings, including witches.”

For Norcross the books are more than typical historical fiction. “It’s not just the historical fiction that keeps readers coming back for more, but also the steamy romance between Diana and Matthew Clairmont.”

“The Book of Life,” concludes Harkness’s “All Souls Trilogy,” and understandably, some readers will lament the end, though the story may continue, albeit in a slightly different format. Harkness is working to develop the story for television. “At the moment I’m working with the BBC to develop the All Souls Trilogy for television,” she explains.

What comes next is less certain. “After that, I honestly don’t know,” Harkness says. “I have many more stories to tell. We will have to wait and see what they contain.”

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