

Inspired by History

Twelve years ago, while attending a book festival in the beautiful Dutch Cape town of Franschhoek in the winelands of the Western Cape, I found myself in the Huguenot graveyard beside the Huguenot Memorial Museum which stands at the end of the town beneath the Franschhoek Mountains. Walking between the headstones, seeing the names of those refugees who had fled persecution in France to build new lives for themselves and their families in southern Africa, a story began to take shape – a novel starting on the eve of the wars of religion in France that would rip the country in two. I knew the series would end in Franschhoek and begin in Carcassonne, and cover three hundred years of history but, beyond that, it was a blank page. This is the joy of writing historical fiction – the ability of an author to slip between the gaps of what we know and what we can suppose to be true, the privilege of bringing other worlds and other times to vivid life on the page.

So, after all these years of researching, writing, travelling – from Carcassonne, Paris and La Rochelle in France to Amsterdam and Rotterdam in the Netherlands, Las Palmas in Gran Canaria – I have finally arrived back in southern Africa in *The Map of Bones*.

The novel you hold in your hands is a detective story, it's the story of exploration and pioneering women, it's about the power of words and history and colonisation, about the possibility of creating new lives on the other side of the world after the horrors of war and exile. It has been surprisingly emotional, saying goodbye to characters who have kept me company for so many years – but I hope more than anything that readers will feel I have done them, and the story justice. I'm not ashamed to admit that I wrote the Epilogue with tear or two in my eye – it feels genuinely like the end of an era. On the other hand, it leaves me free to start dreaming, planning and researching my next series of novels.

Watch this space ...

16th.