



# Mystery of the Englishman's Mexican family

**W**HEN Robin Bayley retraced the steps of his great-grandfather to Mexico he fell in love, met some witches and acquired 300 family members.

In his debut book *The Mango Orchard*, Mr Bayley, who lives in Hampstead, tells of how he returned to the site of his grandmother's enchanting tales of his great-grandfather Arthur, or Arturo to the Mexicans.

But on his trip in 1994 he got more than he bargained for.

When Mr Bayley, 42, who worked in children's television, arrived in the city of Tepic, a small village in Arturo's time, he was merely searching for stories of his ancestor. But when he mentioned Arturo's surname he was told "the whole village" bore

No one knows what surprises might surface when a family history is examined. And for Robin Bayley, those surprises were nothing short of extraordinary, as **Josh Pettitt** reveals

the name. He said: "There were all kinds of reactions when I first got there. Some thought I was Arturo's reincarnation. He is still a very respected figure.

"I went because of the stories my grandmother told me and I was accepted by my Mexican family because of the stories their relatives had told them. It just goes to show the importance of storytelling.

"When my great aunt was almost three years old, Arturo moved her and his wife back to England but he then came back and took up with his daughter's nanny, Maria, until 1912 when he

was forced out of Mexico because of the revolution."

It was from his relationship with Maria that Arturo fathered an illegitimate daughter. When she in turn had 11 children the family grew and grew.

Mr Bayley still receives emails from distant relatives dotted across Mexico who have heard of his visits.

Today, there are more than 300 members of the Greenhalgh family in Mexico, three quarters of whom still live in Tepic. He said: "When I got back to England I went to see my grandmother and told her what I had found out.

"Whereas it was fantastically exciting for me, it was horrendous for her, discovering what her father had done.

"And then about six months afterwards she called me, a month after her 90th birthday, and said: 'Let's go.'

Mr Bayley said: "I have never seen a fiesta like it."

It took him five years to write *The Mango Orchard* which he dedicated to his grandmother, who read it twice before she died in 2009. She was 103.

He said: "My grandmother told me how every Sunday, Arturo would clear everyone out



**SMILE, PLEASE:** Group shot of some of the Mexican family, top left.

**HORSEMEN:** Arthur and Robin, above, and grandma Tio Arturo with Robin



of the dining-room and write letters to Mexico. No one knew what they were about and who they were to.

"When I was in Mexico I discovered he had actually been writing and sending money to a friend who would then pass the letters on to his illiterate mistress.

"But his friend died in 1940 and some letters were never passed on. Both died not having known what happened to the other.

"When I related the story to my family out there they slapped the table smiling and said: 'Then he returned.' It was a kind of

spiritual homecoming for my Mexican family and it made up for any sense of abandonment."

Asked how life here compares to Mexico, Mr Bayley replied: "Whereas my great-grandfather could not go back because he would have been killed, I can go back.

"Hampstead is a polar opposite of Mexico and I can enjoy both – that is the beauty of modern living.

"I have tried to leave London so many times but I keep coming back. I love the diversity we enjoy – it has everything."