

North author discovers a secret family of 400 in Mexican village

Relative merits of history is revealed

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A NORTH East author who embarked on a quest to follow in the footsteps of his great-grandfather discovered his secret family – all 400 of them – in a remote Mexican village.

As a child, Robin Bayley was enchanted with tales of his Victorian ancestor Arthur “Arturo” Greenhalgh, who travelled to Mexico to work in a cotton mill in 1898.

Determined to uncover more, Robin decided to follow Arturo’s route and travelled to Latin America, finding a shocking skeleton in the family closet along the way.

When he reached Bellavista, near Tepic, in the west of the country, he found more than 400 relatives – all the result of a secret affair his great-grandfather had.

When Arturo had returned to a quiet life in England in 1912, he had left behind a lover and an illegitimate daughter, whose 11 children – a century later – had multiplied into a thriving family of 400.

With the “whole village” having the same eyes, pale skin, and even surname, Robin was welcomed into a tribe of Greenhalghs in the heart of Latin America.

Robin, from Barnard Castle, County Durham, said: “As a child, my grandmother told me fabulous stories about her father’s adventures in the Americas.

“She told me about gunfights, hidden bags of silver, scrapes with bandits and a

narrow escape from the Mexican Revolution. There was something in the stories that to me seemed missing – an ending.

“As I grew up, the sense that my great-grandfather had left something behind in Mexico for me to find grew ever stronger.”

Eventually, Robin could resist no longer and gave up his job as a children’s TV executive and set out in his ancestor’s footsteps.

“When I got there, I went to the factory where he worked,” said Robin, 44.

“I was told the whole village was related to me. I discovered that he had left a secret family behind, and quite a lot of the villagers carry the family resemblance.”

Robin returned to England and broke the news to his grandmother, who although initially horrified, eventually came round to her new family thousands of miles away.

The pair returned to Mexico, where they were greeted with a Mariachi fanfare and a fiesta of hundreds of Mexican relatives, their faces wet with tears.

Now a book Robin has penned about his remarkable discovery is set to hit the shelves on April 7.

The Mango Orchard, published by Random House, is the story of parallel journeys, a hundred years apart, into the heart of Latin America.

“The Mango Orchard is the account of my journey in the footsteps of my great-grandfather around Latin America,” said Robin, who spent five years writing



HISTORY Arthur “Arturo” Greenhalgh, Robin Bayley’s great-grandfather who travelled to Mexico in 1898

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the book. Robin, who has since visited Mexico six times and welcomed relatives to the UK four times, will speak about his book at the Words of the Water Festival of Words and Ideas, at The Studio, in Keswick, Cumbria, on March 11.



SIMILARITIES A small part of the 400-strong family who are all related to author Robin Bayley, right

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