

The Diary



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Naughty boy, Arturo!

Writer finds 300 'lost' relatives

ROBIN Bayley was eating nachos with the long-lost Mexican family sired by his libidinous great grandfather Arthur when a female cousin nudged him in the ribs.

"This is what women were like for Arturo (their name for him), have one, then another, then another," she giggled in Spanish.

Sitting next to Robin was his Sheffield grandmother Ruth, who Robin had flown out to Mexico to meet her father's descendants, now over 300 of them.

"What is she saying?" asked Ruth. "Nice nachos, Granny," he said.

If his first book, *The Mango Orchard*, was fiction you'd think it was too far-fetched. But it's fact.

"It is an enormous story spanning 100 years, two continents and hundreds of people," says Robin, now 43, who grew up in Nether Edge. Parents Michael and Fleur still live here.

The story starts in 1898 when Arthur Greenhalgh leaves behind his fiancée Mariah and sets out for New York to seek his fortune.



Family snap: Robin Bayley, back left, with mum Fleur and Mexican relatives; Granny Ruth is in the centre

He ends up running a cotton mill in Mexico and brings out Mariah, who gives birth to their first daughter Sophia.

As trouble brews (the book coincides with the 100th anniversary of the Mexican Revolution), Arthur and Mariah return to England, pregnant with their second daughter Ruth, Robin's granny.

But Arthur doesn't stay long before going back to Mexico where he takes up

with another Maria (without an 'h') and fathers another daughter, Quitita, in 1908.

Two years later, as fighting erupts, he flees the country, leaving his second family behind.

As a lad, Robin heard stories in the family from his granny Ruth, in particular how her father had befriended a bandit, El Jefe, by giving him money.

In return El Jefe warned

him his life was in danger and to flee.

But Robin, who went to Hunters Bar Junior and High Storrs, thought there must be more.

"He had been there some years. What did he leave behind? It was a hunch."

And a shock. He was 26 when he decided to follow his great grandfather's footsteps, setting out in 1992. Three years later he found he had a

Mexican family. "But he was a Methodist!" Robin said in surprise.

"Arthur left one daughter but she had 11 children and they each had at least four children," he says.

The Mexican Greenhalghs had shortened their name to Greenhal. "One of them asked me, how do you say Greenhalgh?"

His Mexican family had thought Arturo, as they called him, had died on the Titanic on the way home so he was as much a surprise to them as they were to him.

"The women thought I was his reincarnation," he laughed.

One relative asked: "Why did you come looking for us if you didn't know we were here?"

Good question but how do you explain a hunch?

Of course, Robin had to break the story to Ruth - we nearly all the story - and, aged 90, she flew out to see them and some, as the photo shows, came to Sheffield in 2004. Sadly, she died last year.

Arthur never went back to Mexico and his secret family although he sent letters.

"Maria never got them because they contained money which was stolen. When they were found the family felt it best not to tell her," says Robin.

■ He signs copies of *The Mango Orchard* at Waterstones, Orchard Square, next Wednesday at 6.30pm. Published by Preface at £12.99.

So how did he meet a girl like Maria?

DOES Robin take after his great grandfather Arthur Greenhalgh?

"I am told I am like him in quite a few ways. My eyes are green," he says cautiously.

Robin, like Arturo, is also a bit of a Romeo.

On his way to Mexico, in Guatemala he has an affair with Juanita, with another girl in England then...but you'll have to read the book!

"The one thing we do share in common is wonderlust. It drives us the same way," he says.

Robin, who now writes full time after careers in television and advertising, has never got to the bottom of how Arturo met his second Maria.

Some said she was the family's nanny in Mexico and Arturo sent his wife and

Sophia home before it was obvious she was pregnant.

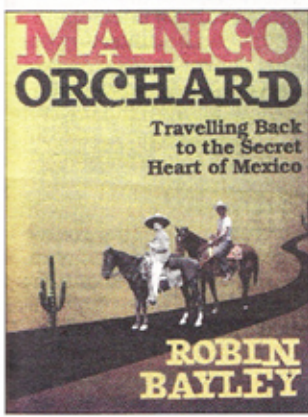
Others said they met when the factory organised a baquet and she was a pastry chef, that she was a factory worker whose loom he repaired and wooed her with a pink rose on her doorstep every morning.

Yet others, unromantically, claimed naughty old Arturo had simply exercised

what the French call *droit de seigneur*.

Or could it have been Maria who did the running? "If the women in the family get up to any dodgy business they say they can't help the seves because it is in their genes!" laughs Robin.

The book could become a film so who would play Robin? "James McAvoy," he says.



Mango Orchard: Book cover