

# Man discovers 400 relatives in remote Mexican village

► Dale man shocked and amazed after trip to South America

BY TREVOR BROOKES  
Chief Reporter

WHEN a man from Teesdale followed in the footsteps of an ancestor, he discovered 300 relatives in a remote Mexican village.

Robin Bayley, who grew up in Scargill near Barnard Castle, had always been fascinated by family stories about the life of his great grandfather, Arthur Greenhalgh.

Arthur travelled the globe and ended up running a cotton mill in Mexico at the turn of the 20th Century.

When Robin recently travelled to the South American country to find out more, he was shocked to discover Arthur's hidden past.

The Victorian adventurer had fathered a daughter during an affair and the girl went on to have a large family of her own.

Arthur's descendants have prospered and when Robin visited the Mexican village, they thought he was a reincarnation of his great grandfather.

The unexpected discovery has changed Robin's life and he has written a book about the experience.

The Mango Orchard was published a few weeks ago and has already sold many more copies than the bestseller Blood River in the same timescale.

Robin, 43, said: "I always thought there was something more to the stories about Arthur – that there was something I wasn't being told.

"It seemed like there was something missing. An ending.

"What I found has changed my life completely. It made me realise what a small part I was in something so wonderfully vast. It's a very comforting, as well as humbling."

The story of the two parallel journeys – a hundred years apart – began in 1898.

It was then that Arthur left behind fiancée Mariah and set out

## FAMILY'S INCREDIBLE STORY REVEALED



**ULTIMATE ADVENTURE:** Just a tiny part of Robin Bayley's 'new' family, who thought he was the reincarnation of his ancestor.



**HISTORY REPEATING:** Robin Bayley, left and inset, and his great grandfather Arthur Greenhalgh, who had a remarkable hidden past.

for New York to make his fortune.

He went on to run a cotton mill in Mexico and Mariah travelled to join him. Soon after, she gave birth to a daughter. The young family returned to England with their second daughter, Ruth, who is Robin's grandmother.

But Arthur went back to Mexico, where he met Maria, a Mexican girl, and fathered another daughter, called Quitita.

Quitita had 11 children and they each had at least four. The Mexican Greenhalghs kept their name but shortened it to Greenhal.

Many years later, Ruth told a young Robin stories of her father's Mexican adventures – of bandits, wild jungle journeys, hidden bags of silver and his narrow escape from the bloody Mexican Revolution.

Robin, who now lives in London, abandoned a successful media career to retrace his great grandfather's footsteps.

Along the road, he encountered witches, drug dealers and an ex-Nazi diamond trader.

He was threatened with deportation, offered the protection



of Colombian guerrilla fighters and fell in love and almost gave up his quest.

He said a sense of destiny drove him on to western Mexico, where he discovered much more than he had ever expected.

When his Mexican relatives realised who Robin was, one asked: "Why have you come to look for us if you didn't know we were here?"

Robin said: "I replied that I had a hunch, but it didn't wash with them."

The villagers had kept photos of Arthur as well as artefacts, including a cup. They welcomed Robin into their family.

"They first thought I was the reincarnation of Arthur – that was very strange for me," he said.

Robin often returns to stay with his 'new' family and will go back to the Mexican village, which has a population of about 1,000 people, for a wedding in June.

He had also arranged for Ruth to see her father's descendants.

"For her, the story had a different meaning because her father had been unfaithful," Robin said.

The author waited several years to write *The Mango Orchard*, which has been published by Random House. It is already in reprint and has won praise from critics, especially travel writers.

Robin said: "I waited until the time was right to tell the story. I hope people enjoy it."