

Meet your family — all 400 of them

Robin Bayley went to Mexico to research his great-grandfather's life and uncovered an astounding secret. Interview by Helen Rumbelow

to find trace of him. After months of searching, he finally tracked down the village where Arthur worked. But what he found there was shocking. Arthur had led a secret double life — as Arthur, and as the man the locals knew as Arturo. Robin's arrival would uncover a story of guilt and betrayal, the tortured conscience of a man forced to choose between two women, two daughters and two continents.

"On the bus approaching the village, I realised what a name rupture it was. The chance of our finding any trace of Arthur, a man who had left nearly a century ago, were millions to one."

Expecting to find nothing, Robin approached a man in the village and enquired after Arthur Greenhalgh. "Greenhalgh? Nearly the whole village is called Greenhalgh?" This he said. "Do you want to meet your relatives?" Within ten minutes Robin was introduced to a cousin he never knew he had, a man with brown hair and pale skin.

"In local English," Robin told the man, "that's because I'm English."

"In my opinion," the man replied, "Robin had no idea what was going on, but he'd changed on the way. He'd been in a war and had travelled in time." That afternoon he had discovered a treasure scarcely deep in the heart of Mexico: a tribe of Greenhalghs with pale skin and green eyes who resembled Robin's father. In all, there were more than 400 of Robin's relatives who no one back in England had any idea existed.

How had this happened? The next few days were overwhelming. "Every day I would meet 20, 30, 40 new relatives. Some thought that Robin was Arthur's insurance, others would not get over the shock that Arthur had survived. The last they had heard of Arthur Greenhalgh was when he sailed for England in 1902. When news filtered through about the sinking of the Titanic, they assumed that he had drowned."

Slowly, Robin pieced together the English and Mexican sides of the story. Arthur had taught his British girlfriend, Maria, to live with him in Mexico. Just before she died, she had written, "I'm 1902 they had a daughter, which they named Maria, too, after her mother. Three years later, Arthur returned to England with his wife and little girl. His wife was pregnant with their second child, but she would grow up to be a nobody."

But Arthur was now in Mexico. The money



Checkrise, from top left: Arturo, right, as a horseback in his memoirs; Robin Bayley and his grandmother; Ruth, with a few of their Mexican relatives on the steps of Arturo's old cotton mill in the village of Bellavista, western Mexico, 1996; villagers perform a traditional dance; Ruth with 'Pa' (cuck)' Arturo and The Enigma, 1996; the porch at Arturo's mill



was good, his status was high, he had aristocratic. So he returned alone — but he was also lonely. So he did something that you could consider either understandable or odd. It was like faithfully writing to his wife back in England, he took on a mistress: a local woman, Maria. He chose a wife-substitute with the same name as his wife. But a girl gets pregnant. 'Arturo', now fluent in Spanish, lived with his Mexican mistress for several years. They had a daughter. What did Arthur call this child? Maria. He had replicated his family, with a wife and young daughter of the same name on either side of the Atlantic.

Arthur's Mexican daughter would tell her family that some of her fondest memories were of her father singing her old-fashioned English nursery rhymes and cooking Irish-style puddings and cakes. By the time Robin got to the village Arthur's Mexican daughter had died, but

“Deep in the heart of Mexico lived a tribe of Greenhalghs with pale skin and green eyes, who resembled Robin's family

she left behind ten children and all their many descendants. "The memory of Arthur was kept alive through stories, the artefacts he had left behind, and recipes. I'd often say to one of my granddaughters, 'Oh, that tastes nice', and she would say it came from Arthur." But Arthur's life was in danger as a colonial businessman he was a target for bandits and the agitation of the Mexican revolution. When he was told that he would be killed he stayed. Arthur decided to return to England, where he lived with his first family for the rest of his life and never breathed a word about the other Maria, mistress or daughter. Arthur's British colleagues, who chose to stay with his Mexican mistress, were stalked in his sleep.

Arthur never got Robin. Robin's grandmother recalls that she was 7 when the first her father, "swelling of

coffered with tanned skin". He loved cigars, and taught his girls snippets of Spanish. Every Sunday Arthur would retreat to write a letter to 'a friend in Mexico'. Robin later found out that some of those hundreds of letters ever reached his Mexican family. They contained money, which was stolen; the endpapers were thrown away. His Mexican family had no way of contacting him, and assumed that he had died.

If Arthur's hand had not been forced the Mexican Revolution, would he have stayed with his second family? "It's a good question," says Robin. "I don't know. I know it was exciting at first. I do feel the dilemma and the guilt, how his Mexican daughter must have remained him of his English daughter and vice versa."

There are other echoes. Robin himself left a girlfriend in England to go on the trip and, along the way, met a new girlfriend who was based in Guatemala. He abandoned both to his search for his great-grandfather. "The ironic thing was it was Arthur himself who was driving me away from them."

When the epiphany of discovering his father's family had subsided, Robin had the painful task of breaking the news to his 90-year-old grandmother. "Initially she was horrified. All those hundreds of new relatives meant that her father had been unfaithful to her mother. It was shocking. Her sense of propriety took over and she sent them a welcoming note, but I could tell it was what she thought the right to do, rather than what she wanted to do."

"What made it so extraordinary for her was that it did not fit with the man she knew. Yes, Arthur was unfaithful to his wife. But when he returned, he was very contented. They had a great marriage. He was a homemaker. I love to mention he was a housewife."

Robin finally returned to England. He sat with his grandmother, and the roles were reversed. Instead of her telling tales of Arthur in Mexico, it was he telling her. It was then that she thought, "So I'm going to enjoy this. It's what Arthur would have wanted."

And in the 90-year-old travelled out to Mexico, to visit her but sister's grave and be enticed with her half-cousins and half-cousin nephews in the biggest fiestas anyone in the village of Bellavista could remember. Ten years later, Robin has written a book, *The Mango Orchard*, about the whole story. Just after Robin's grandmother had read it and heard that it would be published, dedicated to her, she died, aged 103.

"It was like she was holding on for me," says Robin. "I felt that Arthur had created unbridled emotional business."

To me, it's the book about fidelity. Robin's reluctance to commit to a part of his inheritance from Arthur, who also could not choose. "I had some heart-breaking moments. I did feel the echo of my great-grandfather." When Robin's grandmother went on her big trip to Mexico, she was able to swap stories of Arthur. From his fathering to his cake recipes. When she was asked what Spanish he taught her, Robin's grandmother said, "I taught her Spanish and English. I taught her the song that he sang to soothe his children. My great-grandmother started to sing in Spanish, and was joined by her Mexican sisters, who sang down to the rest of them. They all felt the voice of Arthur in the room."

"Little white coral-beaded shoes, which were going to be a rite of passage."

The Mango Orchard: Travelling Back to the Secret Life of Mexico by Robin Bayley published by Piaton, £12.99. To order for £11.99 see page, call 0494 272234 or visit timesonline.co.uk/bookshop

I was the manufacturer that didn't seem right. And the massive Mexican hat, and the horse. The more of Robin Bayley's childhood he spent staring at the photos of his great-grandfather the more of a puzzle it seemed. How could a man who spent his life as a hedonist say Victorian gentleman have part in which he looked like a "smooching, jangle-ringing monkey"? And why did someone in his family seem very interested in finding out?

Start, his grandmother told him a few tales about Arthur Greenhalgh and how he had spent a few years in Mexico just before she was born. But "that picture had a kind of magic."

Manchester where was caught up in the Mexican revolution. I thought he must have a dual personality. I felt I had no right to it."

When he was in his mid twenties, Arthur Greenhalgh left his girlfriend and job for a new life in the cotton mills of Central America. And in his mid twenties, Robin Bayley, his son, was born. He grew up in London to a

and girlified in London to try