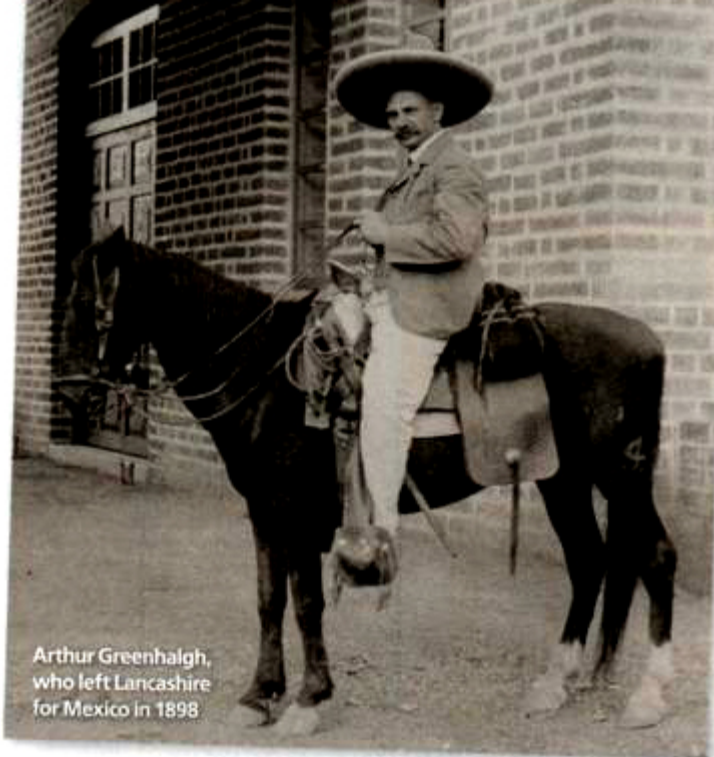


# MY FAMILY HERO

Readers reveal a gem from their family tree



**ROBIN BAYLEY** left his job to unravel the true story of his great grandfather's adventures in Central America. His book, *The Mango Orchard: Travelling Back to the Secret Heart of Mexico* (Preface Publishing), is out now



Arthur Greenhalgh, who left Lancashire for Mexico in 1898

## 'My ancestor led a secret double life in Mexico'

With a wife and child in England, Arthur Greenhalgh moved to Latin America and had a secret second family

Robin Bayley grew up listening to tales of his great grandfather's adventures in Latin America. How could he forget the sepia photograph of his forebear, complete with Mexican hat and moustache, astride a handsome black horse? But even as a child, Robin felt that there was something more intriguing than even his grandma's stories suggested.

"I just felt there was something I wasn't told," he says. "Not that my grandma was keeping anything from us, but that there was more of a story than we knew. So when I got an opportunity to take voluntary redundancy, it was my chance to see what, if any, traces he'd left behind."

Armed only with the knowledge that Arthur had lived in a small village with a mango orchard near Guadalajara, Robin tracked down the mill where his ancestor worked in the early 1900s. There he enquired after the

name, Arthur Greenhalgh. "The whole village was called Greenhalgh!" he was told.

Robin then went to meet his relatives. Much to his amazement, he'd discovered a

whole tribe of pale-skinned, green-eyed Greenhalghs in the heart of Mexico – all of them descendants of his great grandfather. "Like me, they had heard all sorts of stories about their English ancestor," says Robin.

The son of a Lancashire mill owner, Arthur set sail for a new life in Central America in 1898. Once settled at a cotton mill in Mexico, he brought over his British girlfriend, Maria. They married and, in 1902, had a daughter, also called Maria. Arthur later returned to England where his wife had their second child, Ruth, Robin's grandmother.

### A secret history

But Arthur soon went back to settle in Mexico, only this time he went alone. While writing to his family in England, he took a mistress, another Maria, who gave him a daughter, yet another Maria. Having replicated his English family in Mexico, 'Arturo' was now living a bizarre double life across two continents.

"His Mexican daughter had 11 children, who all had several themselves," explains Robin. "The first thing I had to tell them was that he hadn't died on the *Titanic*, as they had been told when he didn't return after 1912. They remembered him through recipes, stories and photos of him looking very much the English gent."

A novice family historian, Robin had started with the shipping records held in the UK, but soon found himself in archives as far

afield as New York and Mexico City. "It was exciting to see the plot reveal itself bit by bit, but it was also quite emotional," he says.

Robin discovered that Arthur hastily fled to England in 1912, during the Mexican Revolution, when his life was in danger from bandits and agitators. He then stayed with his first family for the rest of his life, never breathing a word about his other family. "One of the real tragedies was that he had written hundreds of letters to his family in Mexico but none got through – they were all stolen for the money they contained," says Robin. "So the Mexican Greenhalghs had no idea what had happened to their English ancestor until I turned up."

So now that he's uncovered all the secrets and penned a book about his quest (reviewed in our August issue), how does Robin feel about his great grandfather? "I'm extremely fond of him," Robin replies. "He was a colourful character and a family man, but someone who must have suffered every day with guilt." The story came as quite a shock to Robin's grandmother: "When I first told her, she was horrified, but eventually she came round and embraced the whole thing." Then, at the age of 90, she travelled to the village of Bellavista to meet her Mexican relatives. "My great grandfather could never unite his two families," says Robin. "The only way that could happen, it turned out, was through me." ■ *Daniel Cossins*

### WHO IS YOUR HERO?

Do you have a family hero you'd like to see featured in *Who Do You Think You Are?* Magazine?

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