

Robin Bayley

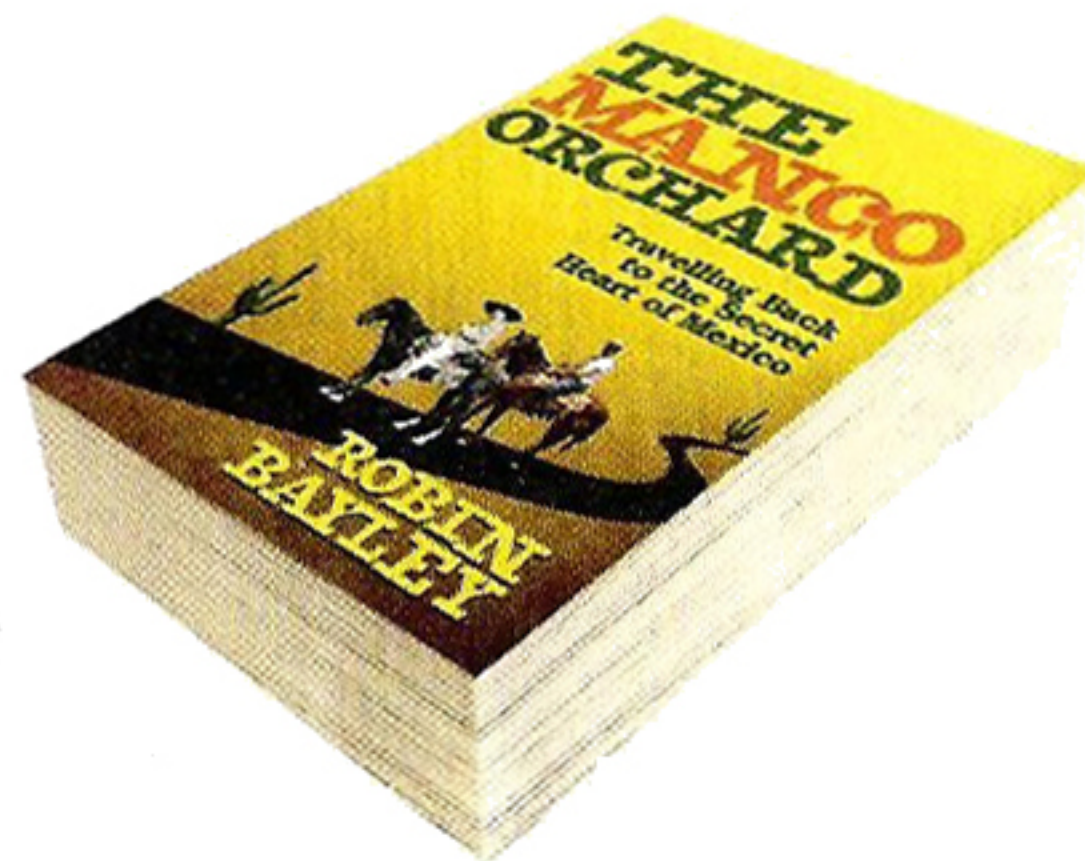
Following in the footsteps of his great-grandfather, Robin Bayley travelled to Mexico, where he unearthed a family secret. By Laura Kelly

When Robin Bayley chucked in his well-paid job, sold his London flat and set off to South America in his mid-twenties, it had all the markings of an early midlife crisis.

As a child, his head was filled with stories of his great-grandfather Arthur Greenhalgh's adventures in Mexico. While he was certain there would be some trace of his ancestor's impact in Central America, he couldn't possibly have guessed how right he would be.

In genealogical adventure *The Mango Orchard*, Bayley tells the

story of the quest that led him around the world to discover 300 members of his family that he had no idea existed. He always



intended to write about the trip: "I thought it would just be a dishvelled gap-year story, but of course it turned out to be something more interesting."

Arthur Greenhalgh (or Arturo, as he was known) left Britain for Mexico at the end of the 19th century to make his fortune in the cotton mills. One hundred years later his ancestor left with nothing more than vague descriptions and slight details of his great-grandfather. After months of searching, Bayley found himself in the village where Arturo lived and worked.

He uncovered a story of betrayal and guilt in his family's past. Finding that "around half" the townsfolk were called Green-

halgh, it transpired that Arturo had led a double life. The buttoned-up Victorian gentleman had a lover and child in Mexico to add to his English wife and children.

This was difficult for Bayley's grandmother: "It almost completely destroyed the impression she had of her father. I felt the dilemma that my great-grandfather had faced," Bayley says. "This is someone for whom home and family is so important, and yet when he was with his daughters in England, he wasn't with his daughter in Mexico. He could never be with all his family at the same time."

Bayley says that his predicament was understandable. "We

go on business trips for maybe a few days – he was away two or three years at a time." Eventually, his grandmother came around and at the age of 90 travelled to see her Mexican relations.

"I was full of admiration and respect – in awe of her really," says Bayley. "What I felt when I went back with grandma to Mexico was the reuniting of the family. It was something Arturo was never able to do."

It took Bayley more than a decade to record his Mexican adventure, and he is grateful that his grandmother lived long enough to see him complete the mission.

The Mango Orchard (Preface, £12.99) by Robin Bayley is out now