



● Chris and Gary Burke.



BURKE BROS MOVING GROUP CELEBRATES 40TH ANNIVERSARY

Burke Bros Moving Group turns 40 this year. Deputy Editor David Jordan took a trip to the company's headquarters in Wolverhampton to meet founders Gary and Chris Burke to learn more about their story.

For those unfamiliar with the geography of England, Wolverhampton is a major city in the West Midlands once famous for its wool trade and more recently its engineering skills, particularly in the aerospace and automotive industries. The city is also home to Premier League football club, Wolverhampton Wanderers (Wolves) who have entertained fans at their Molineux Stadium since 1889.

Despite being proud to identify as life-long 'Wulfrunians', as locals are known, Gary and Chris Burke were actually born in Belfast and moved to Wolverhampton as young children when their father landed a job as a policeman and brought the family over.

After starting their working lives in engineering and financial services the brothers, encouraged by their father,

decided to start their own business. "Dad was convinced there was an opportunity in the removals industry having had trouble finding someone when we moved to a new house," said Gary. "I remember him saying 'they're all dipsticks', and he thought there was a great opportunity for us."

So, in 1982 with less than £1,000 in the bank, and a second-hand Luton van, Gary and Chris began their fledgling removals business.

"Our original idea was to do light haulage and parcel deliveries," explained Gary. "We advertised in the local papers and put cards in shop windows, but all we got were enquiries from private customers wanting to move fridges, sofas, or pianos. We realised that Dad was right, there was a big demand for removals and the business just evolved from there."

It soon became clear to the brothers that to be successful they would need to have storage facilities and when a three-year lease became available on a local industrial estate, they decided to take a chance. "Our Mother went bonkers," remembered Chris. "You can't sign a lease, you'll be tied in for three years, what if it doesn't work out?" she said. "But we explained that lots of customers had asked if we did storage and we were going to go ahead. Within three weeks it was full and we kicked ourselves for not renting a bigger unit!"

Gary and Chris soon realised they would need to rent a larger warehouse and move into containerised storage. That would mean buying containers, side-opening vans, a fork lift and hiring extra staff to run it; but that would take money they didn't have. "We went to our bank, but they weren't



interested, they said it was too risky, in fact no one we approached would back us," said Gary. "We eventually managed to contract-hire container vans and a fork lift truck and I persuaded our suppliers to give us extended credit until we got things rolling. Simpson Packaging were particularly kind, and I'm eternally grateful to them and all our other suppliers for their help. We remember things like that, and forty years later we're still dealing with the people who believed in us during those early days," said Gary.

The brothers went on to purchase three leading Midlands removal companies: Hudson & Rudge Removals Birmingham Ltd, George Clark Removals Ltd (Wolverhampton) and Goddards Removals Rugby Ltd. After several years they incorporated the companies into the formation of the Group.

I asked Gary what he thought was the key to their success? "I think it's that we've always been proactive," said Gary. "When we started forty years ago, most of our competitors were just reactive, sitting around waiting for the phone to ring; we never did that. We went after people and won some big contracts such as BT, West Midlands Police and even the RAF. If we heard a company was moving, we'd get in

touch and try to get their business. I think that's what made us different."

Today, Burke Bros Moving Group is one of the most successful moving companies in the West Midlands with 45 staff, a fleet of trucks, extensive warehousing and partners across the globe. In 1995 the brothers purchased the three-acre site they originally rented on Fox's Lane, Wolverhampton and it remains the company's head office. Burke Bros is a member of a number of trade networks including BAR, FIDI, IAM and PAIMA. In 2010, Gary became vice president of PAIMA and was involved in the decision-making process to transfer the Association's headquarters from Panama to Florida.

As a long-standing Wolverhampton company, Gary and Chris are dedicated to supporting the local area. For a number of years they have supported local charities including Compton Care - a local hospice that helps patients and their families facing life-limiting illnesses - by donating furniture and books collected from customers, to sell in their network of charity shops. Gary became trustee and non-executive director at the hospice in 2014.

Gary commented, "We've been supported by the local community for almost 40 years as our business has grown and we believe it is right to give something back by helping the community that has been so integral to our own success."

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