



Peter Barron

Two County Durham brothers have clocked up 50 years together in their family business, moving the belongings of celebrities, landed gentry, footballers – and the odd jailbird...

Moving with the times

IT'S been a long old journey, with plenty of bumps in the road along the way, but Malcolm and Ian Ingram are celebrating a record-breaking milestone.

This month marks half a century since they started working together at the family firm – Ingrams Removals and Storage – based in a Bishop Auckland backstreet but known nationwide.

"We reckon it must be a record for brothers working together in a removal business anywhere you can name," says Malcolm. "Of course, we've had ups and downs, and plenty of challenges, but 50 years is something to be proud of, isn't it?"

Ian and Malcolm are the amiable, good-humoured Chuckle Brothers of the removal business: great characters, full of down-to-earth charm, sharp wit, a passion for proper customer service, and a wagonload of tales about the folk they've moved – from the famous to the infamous.

"We always tell people we shifted three dragons," smiles Malcolm, cheekily. "Duncan Bannatyne, Sara Davies – and Janet Street-Porter!"

It's a line that's no doubt been wheeled out many times, but it's odds-on that even the formidable Janet would find it funny.

Ian started in the business as a 12-year-old in 1960, going on to become The Gaffer ten years later, with Malcolm joining three years down the road.

Their dad, Bill, had his own business, buying and selling boxes, and Ian's first childhood role was taking the labels off cartons.

In the 1950s, Bill was one of the few locals to own not just vans but a minibus too. He started hiring the vehicles out, and the removals business developed from there.

Meanwhile, Malcolm left Woodhouse Close Secondary Modern, in Bishop Auckland, at



It ain't heavy, he's my brother...Malcolm Ingram, left, and brother Ian are celebrating 50 years working alongside each other in the family removal and storage business in Bishop Auckland

PICTURES: PETER BARRON

15, initially working for Turner's decorators, then Dene Engineering, in nearby Coundon, after taking a course at Darlington Tech.

However, it wasn't long before he joined his brother at the company HQ in Percy Street, Bishop Auckland, and the double-act set off.

Malcolm recalls that his first day was spent delivering bedroom furniture from a shop in Bishop to a house in Ferryhill, and produces a pay-slip showing his first wage was £28.60.

"We've hardly stopped ever since," laughs Malcolm, who now has the title of Operations Director.

"Hamburg, Rotterdam, the Orkneys, Shetlands, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, north, south, east and west – you name it, we've probably been there."

The clientele has certainly been a mixed bag of humanity. Apart from the "three dragons", customers have included North-East football stars Kevin Phillips and Rob Lee; television botanist David Bellamy; a laird who was relocating from

the Isle of Harris to Lincolnshire; financier and philanthropist Jonathan Ruffer; and the Bishop of Durham, Paul Butler, when he succeeded Justin Welby who'd gone off to be Archbishop of Canterbury.

BUT as well as the righteous, there have also been some wrong 'uns in need of shifting. Inevitably, the late George Reynolds – safe-cracker, petty crook, tax-evader, entrepreneur, and the best-known chairman Darlington Football Club is ever likely to have – was among them.

"We moved George a few times, including when he wound up his chipboard business on Shildon Industrial Estate," says Malcolm, checking his records to confirm that the job was on February 9, 2001.

"It was one of the heaviest days of my life because he liked quality Italian furniture, did George, and it had to be moved to a lock-up in Darlington. Speak as you find – he always stayed in touch. He popped in to see us just before he died a couple of years ago."

In contrast, Vince Landa – the notorious "One-armed Bandit King" – proved more elusive than George. Landa was a Cockney, who moved north to set up a fruit machine empire, and whose brother, Michael Luvaglio, was convicted of the 1967 murder of Angus Sibbet.

In April 1997, Landa booked Ingram's to collect his personal possessions from a house in Sunderland and put them into storage. After trying in vain for

several years to get payment for the storage rental, the brothers never saw him again, and the goods were legally sold off in 2007.

Then there was the time, in 1983, when prison governor, Peter Meech, was having his furniture moved to Parkhurst, on the Isle of Wight, after he'd left Durham Jail. The Ingram's lorry was stopped at a police roadblock, in Hampshire, while a search was carried out for six convicts who were on the run after escaping from a van on its way to Parkhurst. The wagon was eventually allowed to continue on its way once the police were satisfied there were no stowaways on board.

More recently, Ingram's were entrusted with the highly specialist job of clearing out the King's Head Hotel, in Darlington, after the fire which memorably lit up the town centre in 2008.

"There's never been a dull moment, and we've always been busy because we have an ethos that the customer always comes first," explains Malcolm.

AND that goes for the storage side of the business too.

The cavernous warehouse is a treasure trove of customers' belongings, and all kinds of paraphernalia that's been picked up over the years.

"Come and have a look in here – you'll love this," insists Ian, unlocking a door and showing me into a unit containing his prized collection of circus and fairground models.

Outside of the business, the brothers admit they don't spend a lot of time together – "60 hours a week at the depot's enough for anybody!" quips Malcolm – but they clearly respect what each other brings to the partnership.

"When Malcolm goes out, people like him straight away," says Ian. "Moving is one of the most stressful things you do in your life, but he puts people at ease straight away. That's why we get so much work."

In return, Malcolm describes his older brother as "a complete perfectionist" who keeps the wagons in such meticulous condition that they're the envy of the trade.

But with Ian now 73, and Malcolm 67, surely the end of the road's in sight for Ingram's Removals and Storage, of Bishop Auckland?

"People have wanted to buy us out, and they're still trying, but we've got no plans to retire – it's a way of life," says Ian.

He glances at his brother for confirmation, but Malcolm can't reply just now because the phone's ringing, with someone – somewhere – needing help.

Another moving story begins.



Malcolm Ingram with customers Jonathan and Jane Ruffer

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