



NewsBRIEF



John Gregory: Past, Present, and Future

2025 marks John Gregory's 40th year at the helm of the business. We spoke to him to find out about his early memories of Gregory Group, his journey to date, and what he has planned for the future.

What is your first memory of Gregory Group?

My first memory was living in Fore Street in North Tawton and the business being 200 yards down the road. My grandparents lived just a little bit further down so nothing in our lives was further than 400 yards from where we lived!

It's a small town, people didn't travel as much in those days, and a lot of people worked there, so everyone knew Gregory, which made for a strong bond.

Did you always think you would take over the reins?

I'm the middle of three sons. After school and doing a degree, I went off to Australia, via Hong Kong. I expected to be there for a year or so and then come back and get a job somewhere else. But my business career in Australia was really exciting and I ended up staying for five years.

During the time I was there my father asked me if I was interested in going back to England and getting involved in the business. That was the first time it was discussed.

My eldest brother had a legal career and my younger brother a teaching career. I was definitely interested in business and therefore more aligned to Gregory than my brothers.



John Gregory on his first day with his Dad Jack Gregory

What were those early days like?

When I started in 1985, I had an arrangement with my father that if he didn't think I was any good within two years, he would tell me and I would leave the business. If I wanted to leave in that period, I could also do so. My father was keen to retire and he actually only stayed at the business for one month after I arrived back.

Those early days were quite a shock to my system. I grew up seeing what seemed a huge family business in North Tawton but then went off and gained experience in international businesses in Australia and the Far East. All of a sudden, the world I grew up in as a child, felt much smaller.

Back then, in this sector, each transport business had its own customers and that was that. There was no interest in deviating from the norm.

What changed?

In the latter part of the 80s, a more entrepreneurial culture developed in the UK and it was all about timing. I was the right person in the right place at the right time.

I wanted to take advantage of that, so I started by literally walking up and down the aisles of supermarkets finding out where something came from. If we already had a truck in say Peterborough, I'd try and find something that came from Peterborough and get their transport into the South West.

Key for me was utilisation. We had 168 hours in each week and I wanted to get as many productive miles out of the truck as possible. I got into the detail in a big way. My father brought me up to identify with the cost of a business and I was driven to protect the margin.



Turn to page 4 to read more about the advice John's Dad gave him, what makes our business different, and his vision for the future of Gregory Group.

Trialling new ways to transport goods with Amazon

Just like us, Amazon has its sights firmly on a net zero future. They plan to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2040 (for Gregory Group, we are aiming to achieve that by 2038). We already provide renewable fuels for Amazon, travelling approximately 1.4 million km per year on HVO, and now we are supporting them with a new initiative.

Together with Amazon, we have partnered with Varamis Rail, the UK's first high speed zero emission electric rail logistics company. As part of a trial, Amazon are transporting goods from Birmingham to Glasgow via electric train. We are then providing the middle mile solution from the train to the Amazon sorting depots. This is additional work to the transport solutions we already provide Amazon. So far, within 7 weeks, the trial has removed 42 tonnes of CO2e from the operation.



A relationship of longevity with Refresco

Refresco is a global beverage manufacturer producing over 40 million litres of drinks every day. We have been supporting their logistics needs for the last 20 years. At the end of last year, we won additional business which is now underway.

Thanks to the new work, we now deliver 30% of Refresco's overall haulage, making us their biggest UK haulier.

This work includes delivering juice to customer Regional Distribution Centres (RDCs), shunt work at one of their major sites, and transportation of raw ingredients. We transport an average of 10,500 loads per annum and are Refresco's sole supplier for their pallet network deliveries.

The last few months have been very busy as we incorporated the increased volumes, but everyone's hard work has paid off. Our customer has praised the team's efforts highlighting some particular successes:

- Delivery performance goal achieved every week since launch.
- Seamless transfer of responsibilities (which included a smooth TUPE).
- HVO used to cover 100% of the miles travelled.

Well done to everyone involved. A sterling effort and brilliant example of what strong customer service can lead to.



Managing the Spring milk surge

Did you know, in the Spring, the volume of milk we collect on behalf of our customers rises by up to 20%? That's because, as Spring arrives, the dairy cows go out to the fields having spent the Winter inside. They munch on the fresh grass which is full of nutrients and subsequently produce more milk.

For the depots in South West England this typically starts in March and for those in West Wales, due to the weather conditions, the peak comes 3-4 weeks later.

This means, for approximately two months, our milk teams work hard to accommodate higher volumes. This is where their experience comes into play. They monitor the milk app and as

the volumes begin to increase, start to make adjustments. This includes:

- Transfer tanks located in central locations to reduce the travel required by the tankers.
- Adjusting routes daily to juggle increasing volumes.
- Extra shifts to keep the momentum going.

It is this adaptability and expertise that our customers appreciate, as demonstrated by a testimonial from Arla:

"You are able to do things on scale, you have quality equipment and systems and have the right outlook. You also have the right people – they always represent a really good image for our business."



CHARGING AHEAD FOR A GREENER FUTURE

Across Gregory Group, work is underway to increase our electric infrastructure. By the Summer, we will be able to charge EV lorries in Bathgate, Cullompton, Southampton, Stowmarket, Bristol and North Tawton.

We will not only have cutting-edge EV chargers, we will also be able to precisely track usage by vehicle, route, and customer.

This level of investment is achievable thanks to funding from ZenFreight, a consortium we are part of. A Government-led programme, delivered in partnership with Innovate UK, the consortium aims to accelerate the shift to zero-emissions HGVs.



EV infrastructure work currently underway at Bathgate



WINTER Photo Competition

The photo competition continues to produce some absolutely stunning photos of Gregory Group during the seasons. Here are the winners from the Winter photo competition, and what corks they are!



Tam Williams, LGV Driver, Bathgate



Ryan Fortnum, Transport Operator, Twynholm



Jason Leake, LGV Driver, Bridgwater

John Gregory - Past, Present, Future cont...

What advice did your Dad give you?

Not to say “no” and he strongly advised me to be risk averse.

Did you heed his advice?

Many people think I am not risk averse, but I think I am. I regret not taking advantage of certain situations over the years. But I think any entrepreneur that sticks with a business for 40 years usually has to be involved in some risky things, whilst trying to pretend that they are risk adverse!

Would Gregory Group be where it is now if you hadn't had the business experience you gained before joining the family business?

It gave me a lot of confidence. I was very fortunate in the two businesses I worked for and I had brilliant people who supported me. During my time there I realised that you have to be creative to influence a business. It also proved to me that if you work hard you can achieve a lot.

Looking back on your 40 years, is there anything you would have done differently?

Yes, I've been too cautious. I'm defining that separate from risk!

On some occasions big would have been better. I always remember one customer wanting us to do more work in the Midlands and when we declined, he told me I lacked ambition. At the time, he was actually right. I wasn't ready to poke our nose into the Midlands when, during that era, we were very much South West focused. We have a presence there now, but I wish I'd been bolder back then.

I also wish that I knew more people who work at Gregory Group. But one of my failings is that I'm appalling at remembering names and I am socially inept at communicating with people when I have other things on my mind!

In the last 40 years we've grown significantly. What do you feel are the key ingredients to that success?

It's all about the people. People at every

level – the driver, warehouse person, person in the yard, person in the office. But for me, it all starts in the transport office. It's all about the relationship between the operator and the driver. They are the ones who can influence the revenue on the truck and the cost of that truck on the day-to-day operation. The support team can add all sorts around that, but it starts and stops at the frontend.

I also reflect on the decision to link the Scottish market to the South West as a particularly strong move. These two parts of the country are relatively low volume but particularly difficult to operate in. For the historic big players, they did not have a strong presence in either market which gave us a real opportunity.

What makes us different to others in this industry?

We offer solutions to our customers that are different to their current solutions and with that we are able to add value to their business. If we can add value to our customers, our customers value us.

We can do this because we've always been innovative. We think beyond what others in the industry are thinking. For example, when we introduced training into the business we were way ahead of our competitors. Trainers didn't exist in logistics and nor did the annual requirement for CPC training. But we could see the value so started training and developing our drivers.

Another example is truck utilisation. I was a strong believer in keeping the trucks on the road day and night and 7 days a week. In the early days few others in the industry thought this was a good idea, but we stuck to our guns and this is now a common practice across our industry.

Would we be where we are today without acquisitions?

No. Acquisitions have been a good way to develop the business. The Scottish businesses are key to our DNA today.

How do you decide which businesses to acquire?

We've been approached to buy hundreds

of businesses. Sometimes we're interested but 90% of the time we aren't.

It's about identifying if there are people who are good at developing the business and if they have the customer base to support their vision. If they do, we're very interested. I also like family businesses – businesses with heritage. Particularly those which have the next generation keen to continue the business.

How does logistics compare today vs 40 years ago?

Back then the margins were fantastic compared to what they are today. By 1994 the margins started to decline and the industry got much more competitive. Between 1994 and 2004, our margins went from 14% to 4%.

What would you change about this industry?

We have seen major changes in this industry before and I think we are due another shift. Thirty years ago, it was incredibly tough in this industry but a huge amount of transport businesses survived because of the creation of the pallet networks.

In 2025, we are arguably facing an even tougher time. The cost is overwhelming for many in the industry and managing customers when you have cost pressures like we have today is unfortunately pushing businesses over the edge at an accelerated rate.

“If we can add value to our customers, our customers value us.”

We're also seeing the age demographic of drivers creep up and a society that demands a different work/life balance to 40 years ago. There's a shortage of skilled labour, people are working too many hours, and either the rates aren't high enough, or the costs are too great.

Something has to give. But this isn't something one person can change; it needs to be a mass change across the industry. My prediction is that we'll reach this point in the next 5 years, and it'll probably see a huge consolidation of businesses in this sector.

What might we not know about you?

I support Plymouth Argyle rather than Exeter City. That is because, when I was

growing up, the most famous footballer in Devon came from North Tawton. He was called Norman Piper and he played for Plymouth Argyle.

What does it feel like fronting a company with your name above the door?

While the company name is very personal to me, it doesn't burden me. I love this business to the point that it is no burden.

What are some of your proudest moments?

Collectively we've achieved a lot. Some of the prominent moments that stand out for me are having our centenary with Prince Charles and being voted the West of England Business of the Year in 2010. That was voted for by peers across many sectors and was a great accolade at the time.

Looking beyond individual events, I am proud of how we have broken the mould when it comes to women in this industry. When I started 40 years ago there was just one woman working in the business. Today, we have two women on the Board and 3% of our drivers are female. This diversity makes our team stronger. But, while we are surpassing the industry average of 1%, I still feel there is more this industry should do to encourage female drivers.

If I think about what has given me the greatest personal satisfaction, it was our involvement in the Olympics. We sponsored five sports people from the South West and we used the process of promoting them to change our livery and give it

a new life. That's where the strapline “Delivering Winners” came from. Originally it was going to be “Delivering 2012” but the Olympic Committee wouldn't allow us to use that, so it became “Delivering Winners”. That is now across all our brands and since then, I've had a number of companies approach us around the world asking if they could use it.

What were some of the toughest moments from your career?

There's always risk. There are always some unfortunate situations so that's always tough. The whole point of generating and growing a business is to be successful, so failure hurts.

What do you love most about your job?

Coming up with a solution or idea that is going to appeal to a customer. Then you feel that collectively, with their people and our own people, we're on a journey together.

What makes you good at your job?

I think the fact that I am seeking something different every day. I'm never interested in the status quo. But that does mean that getting to the result can frustrate me because, in my eyes, it can take too long!

I'm also good at developing the frontend of the business. That's because I understand the frontend in fine detail. My natural

involvement in the support functions is less, but, thankfully, that's the strength of others.

Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give to your younger self?

To master the work/life balance! But I gave up on that years ago when I realised I was obsessed with this business. And by acknowledging that, I became much more comfortable in my own skin.

Looking ahead, where do you want Gregory Group to go in the future?

Well, we are over 100 years, but we are going to drop the idea that we've been around for 100 years, because we're going to be around for another 100! I have a clear vision of where this business is going to be after me and it will definitely be in the name of Gregory and all our brands in Scotland.

The foundations and heritage of our business are very strong. Everything in my time will be done to protect that heritage and I think by the time it evolves from me, there is every reason to believe it will continue to grow whilst maintaining the same ethos as today.

There is no hiding from the fact that it is a tough market right now. But, when others less fortunate cannot make it through, it does create an opportunity for strong businesses like ours.

Will you still be leading the business in 10 years?

There's no reason why not. My initials are JKG – Just Keep Going!



Jack and John Gregory with the then Prince Charles during the Gregory Group centenary.



Welcome to



Having welcomed John Mitchell to the Gregory Group family in March, this Team Spotlight special introduces you to some of the team, and gives you the low-down about the business itself.



Quick fire introduction

There are **200 in the team** – 30 in the office, 12 in the yard, 8 in the workshop, and 150 drivers.

The business is located right next to **Grangemouth Docks** – a **prime spot** which means they can react quickly to port arrivals.

80% of the logistics solutions provided are **container haulage**.

The target is to load/unload **200 containers** per day.

Container handling is a specialism for the team (which many competitors cannot offer). This includes packing and repacking containers, using a tipping gantry to transfer product, and a fleet of sliding and bulk tipping skeletal.

TEAM SPOTLIGHT



Ross Mitchell
Operations
Director

How has your career unfolded?

As a kid, there was no pressure or expectation that I would get involved with the business. As a teenager I worked in the warehouse handballing goods out of containers. I went to uni, and continued to work in the warehouse around my studies. During this time I thought “you know what, I quite like working here”, so, when I graduated in 2014, I got my Class 1 and Class 2 licences and did some deliveries. This lasted 6 months and then I was thrust into the traffic office. That was the best thing that happened to me. I loved the fast pace, constant challenges and the fact that no two days were the same. I learnt all I could from everyone on the team and then progressed to Operations Manager. Then I became Operations Director, before taking on the role of Managing Director two years ago. Following the acquisition, I am now Operations Director.

“For me, I knew I needed to earn respect.”

What is it like bearing the family business name?

It definitely adds a different dynamic. For me, I knew I needed to earn respect. If I came in and just sat in the office and started bossing people around, it would never have worked. I started in the warehouse, got my licences and proved that I was serious.

What made you decide to sell the business?

Around a year ago, we had the business in great shape. It was clear of debt and my father wanted to retire as Chairman and my sister, who was Business Support Manager, was looking to leave the business to bring up her family. So I had a decision. Did I want to plough my own furrow, or did I want to look at other options?

As we were, with our core business being containers, if a ship was delayed coming into port, we could have 20-30 trucks standing doing absolutely nothing. That’s a real vulnerability and I felt we needed to do something about it to give the business security.

John Gregory was one of the first to show a genuine interest. He came to the office and

asked lots of questions and I knew from our early conversations that we had a similar culture and vision.

What do you hope to achieve for the John Mitchell business?

We have hit the ceiling of where we want to be in Grangemouth. Whilst I once had vehicles that couldn’t work because of bad weather or a delay in the port, now that we are part of Gregory

Group, we can tap into other avenues that will keep them working.

I’ve seen a lot of synergies and I’m looking forward to building relationships and scaling up the business.

How does it feel to be part of a much bigger group?

It is a funny feeling and I was definitely apprehensive about it. But having met quite a few people, everyone has been so welcoming. I feel as though I was on an island before and now I have people around me who all want the best for us. I feel like we have picked a really good custodian.

I’m very proud of the team here. The best thing about business is the people and I’ve been lucky to work with a brilliant bunch.



Tracey Birkett
Finance Manager

Tracey has just reached her 30-year milestone with John Mitchell. Before we dive into what the finance team do, we were curious to find out more about her loyalty to the business.

What has kept you at John Mitchell for the last 30 years?

The people. We have a lot of good characters, many of whom have been with the business for a similar length of time. They make the job enjoyable. I also love the variety of my job. No day is the same and I’ve been lucky to be involved in a lot of different aspects of the business which make it even more interesting.

Tell us what your team get involved in...

There are four of us in the team. Between us we handle all finance functions – sales ledger, purchase ledger, credit control and payroll.

We also produce and send quotes in our department which means we liaise with the customer from the very beginning all the way through to the end of the job. I think this is really valuable because it gives us a connection to what our business actually provides our customers. For straight forward jobs we can fire quotes out quickly but if there is a more involved proposal, we’ll work with the other teams to bring it together.

You’ve seen significant growth in your time with John Mitchell, what has been key to its success?

Definitely team work. It’s not a one person show. Everyone has a voice and I think that has been really important over the years. John Mitchell is very inclusive. Everyone has a part to play and that works really well.



Sandy McGiven
Compliance
and Warehouse
Director

Sandy started life as a mechanic and joined John Mitchell 10 years ago. Today he oversees a variety of areas including warehousing, workshops, health and safety, HR, and general site management. Below he tells us about what keeps him interested and more about what his teams do.

What do you enjoy about your role?

No two days are the same. There’s never a dull moment, and there are always fresh challenges and opportunities. It’s just a good vibrant company to work for.

Tell us about your teams...

I have a few different teams. There are 12 in the warehouse who all have various skills for the different machines we use. We have 18 pieces of lifting equipment ranging from 2.5 tonne forklifts to heavy handlers capable of lifting shipping containers, so there are a lot of specialist skills within this team. We have five warehouses in the yard which are used to store different types of products.

The fleet and container maintenance is managed by Lee so I’ll leave him to tell you more about what that involves.

Then there is the Business Support team who look after vehicle and plant compliance, health and safety, training and insurance. It’s a very busy office that communicates with all other departments and external parties such as insurance, DVSA, and training providers.

Tell us about the teams you support...

There are 15 in the logistics team – 9 on the planning side and 6 on the customer services side. The logistics team look at the workload. They are the ones that run the vehicles, plan the routes, and make sure the right drivers are on the right job with the right skills. We do a lot of specialist bulk work, so they need to ensure the drivers have the right training. One member of the team is also a trainer to ensure skills stay up-to-date. This team also make sure the assets are presented for service and maintenance when required.

The customer service team take the bookings and keep in touch with our customers. For example, there could be



Lee Montgomery
Fleet Manager

Lee began his career as an apprentice for a vehicle manufacturer. After 18 years he moved to John Mitchell as a Fleet Engineer. He’s been with the business for 3 and a half years and last year was promoted to Fleet Manager.

How does John Mitchell compare to your previous role?

While I have always been in the logistics industry, I previously only had sight of maintenance. For me, phoning someone up to say their truck wouldn’t be back until tomorrow had little meaning. At John Mitchell I see the impact that has, which is really valuable. It also makes you feel part of the team – you can see the difference you make.

What does your team do?

Between the 8 of us we run the workshop. It’s our job to keep everything moving. We usually service 10 trailers a day and manage defects and breakdowns. We also look after the forklifts and heavy lifting equipment on site. We have two fabricators on site and they repair shipping containers which can take anywhere between 1 and 16 hours to fix.



The tipping gantry

problems with customs clearing so they will keep the customer updated. A lot of customers have portals, so the team also upload all relevant data into these.

What might surprise people about John Mitchell?

We do quite a bit of bulk discharging of tankers which means we take tanks into different factories and discharge into silos.

The other thing that surprises people sometimes is that the ports are only open Monday to Friday. Ships can still come in and out and be unloaded, but those containers can only move in and out of the port during a week day.

Volunteer Day... in action

Kevin Clarke-Brown is an LGV Driver based in Ecclefechan, Scotland. Outside of work he volunteers with Scottish Mountain Rescue (SMR) – a group of 26 Mountain Rescue Teams who provide specialist search and rescue services in the mountains and remote communities in Scotland.

SMR is a charity with 850 volunteers. As an active member on the callout list, Kevin could be called upon at any time – 24/7, 365 days a year. Training is essential to ensure all volunteers are confident and work effectively with each other when an emergency occurs. To complete a training exercise, Kevin utilised a volunteer day which gives him an additional day of annual leave to complete charity endeavours (something all Gregory Group employees are entitled to).

This saw him, and his fellow volunteers, head to The Devils Beef tub to the north of Moffat town, and The Gray Mare's Tail in the Moffat hills where they had to complete three exercises:



1 Establish secure ground anchors to safeguard technical rigging systems. This ensures it will be safe to extract a casualty using a stretcher.



2 Use technical rigging to move a casualty on a stretcher. This includes lowering and raising the casualty on a steep incline and cliff edge.



3

Setting up a personal belay and ground anchors to be able to accompany the stretcher. Volunteers had to abseil down a steep incline using basic equipment and then ascend the slope unassisted using the same basic equipment.

LONG SERVICE AWARDS

Congratulations and thank you to those of you listed below, together with the 22 of you who also celebrated your 5 year work anniversary in the last three months. Your dedication and commitment is very much appreciated.



Peter James, LGV Driver, North Tawton

Krzysztof Polok, Depot Frontline Manager, Southampton

Alexander Ancell, LGV Driver, Bathgate

Desmond Clarke, LGV Driver, Queenslie

Steven Durward, LGV Driver, Dyce

Frank Thomson, LGV Driver, Queenslie

Christopher Dorans, LGV Driver, Queenslie



Mark Whitwham, LGV Driver, Cribbs Causeway, Bristol

Lee Purser, Driver, Huthwaite

Michael Moore, Warehouse Operative, Southampton

Alan Flower, LGV Driver, Davidstow

Andrew Withers, LGV Driver, Bridgwater



DID YOU KNOW?

During the cricket season, the Craib team will deliver 880,000 pints of beer to Lords Cricket Ground on behalf of one of our customers. That equates to 1,500-2,000 kegs per event!