



Building a dynasty

Apart from the family origins of Cheffins, the present-day firm represents the synergy of many famous local names and firms. Throughout its history, Cheffins has merged, taken over and been amalgamated with a wide range of auctioneers and surveyors, all of which were active in either Saffron Walden, Cambridge, Ely or generally in mid-Anglia.

Joshua Cheffins appears first, in 1811, established as an auctioneer in Bishop's Stortford. He is of particular interest through a diary he kept of key events locally and nationally in the early 19th century, parts of which have survived in the Cheffins' archives.

Shortly afterwards, in 1825, R D Thurgood of Saffron Walden set up in business and it is from this date that Cheffins' 185th. anniversary is calculated. The link between this firm and Cheffins was subsequently made in 1903 when its successor, B T Thurgood & Sons, was acquired by Henry Joshua Cheffins, the powerhouse behind the development of the Cheffins name.

Henry Joshua started out on the acquisition trail much earlier than 1903, however. In 1875 he bought the auctioneering business of Wm Rand who established Saffron Walden's new livestock market in 1860 and it was this that gave Henry the springboard for rapid growth. Wm Rand had been established in 1850. Henry paid a total of £2,800 for the business and livestock market – £1,500 for the freehold premises and £1,300 for the goodwill.

In 1876 the style 'Mr Cheffins' was being used on publicity material but this changed with the acquisition of B T Thurgood, creating Cheffins & Slocombe (Mr Slocombe having been a partner in Thurgood). This launched another period of great success for Cheffins but the partnership was shortlived and by mid-1905 Slocombe's name had been dropped, the firm reverting to 'Mr Cheffins'.

The first two decades of the 20th century proved a great success for Henry Joshua Cheffins – his family connections with the bankers Gibson in particular gave his business a strong base. Mr Cheffins died in 1922 and was succeeded by H I Watson and G J Bowtle who traded as Messrs Cheffins.

The Cambridge and Ely branches

In following the build up of Cheffins it's important to step back at this point and look at its forebears in Cambridge and Ely.

As Henry Joshua Cheffins built his empire in Saffron Walden, other firms of surveyors and auctioneers were developing elsewhere. In Cambridge, three firms in particular are of note. Chas Wisbey was established as an auctioneer in Trinity Street, Cambridge, in 1865, subsequently becoming Wisbey & Son. Ten years later Grain & Long set up in St Andrews Street, and later, in 1884, John Moyes opened up in Downing Street as an auctioneer.

Each of these firms moved towards their destiny, merging in 1905 to become Grain, Moyes & Wisbey and, eventually, in 1910 becoming A T Grain & Sons, which also had an office in Newnham Street, Ely.

Parallel to all this activity was the firm of H P & T Chalk, established in 1882 as auctioneers of No 11 Dead Telegraph Office and Cambridge Corn Exchange. This firm subsequently became Philip & Thos Chalk of Alexander Street and then Messrs Chalk of Cambridge and Linton, later to revert to H P & T Chalk .

Then, in 1937, the key amalgamation took place with the formation of Grain & Chalk. The importance of this merger lies in the fact that Thomas Chalk and Bob Arnold (formerly a partner in H P & T Chalk) were partners also of Messrs Cheffins of Saffron Walden!

Diverting for a moment, we need to observe that in 1871, the auctioneers Catling & Mann opened in Free School Lane Cambridge. They progressed to become Catling & Son, located in St Andrews Street and Cambridge Corn Exchange auction rooms, subsequently becoming Catling Brady & Bliss of Regent Street and then Catlings.

At this point we turn briefly to Ely to note that Geo Comins set up as auctioneers in 1867 in Market Place. Just 100 years later, the Big Bang occurs with firstly the formation of Cheffins, Grain & Chalk, quickly followed by the merger with Geo Comins to create Cheffins, Grain & Comins.

Apparently there was vigorous debate about the order of names, particularly as Cheffins was seen as the 'junior partner' in the amalgamations. But it was eventually agreed that the final flow of names sounded better!

Like tributaries to a major river, each of these mergers and amalgamations fed into the creation of the present-day firm of Cheffins, which was renamed in 2001.

Later, in 2003, Catlings joined the fold and the latest piece in the Cheffins jigsaw was the acquisition of Derek Catlin & Co, letting and management agents, in 2008.