

A trade unchanged for 40 years

THE CHENERYS have been brushmakers since 1873, and the trade is still being carried on in Searle Street today by the two brothers, Allan and Gerry.

Their ancestors first made brushes in a village near Diss, in Norfolk in 1873.

It was in 1915 that the family moved to Cambridge. At that time, Laurie and McConnell, who had a large department store in Fitzroy Street, were setting up small workshops in and around Cambridge. The idea was that they could supply their own shop and provide goods for their salesmen to sell in the surrounding district.

The brush company started in Fair

Street and other companies included the Metal Stamp Company in Sturton Street, making kettles and pans, and a wood turning workshop in York Terrace, recalls Allan.

His father's company became limited in the early 1920s with three directors, George Laurie Walker of the store, Henry Scott, who was later knighted, and his father.

At about this time, his father was asked for a trade mark to put on his products. He looked out of the window in Fair Street and saw a don walking down the road wearing his cap and gown and said he would use the word "Don".

Soon, business outgrew the premises and the firm had to move. The new site was on the corner of

Newmarket Road and East Road, a one-and-a-half acre site at present occupied by the huge office block called Compass House.

"It was a splendid site" said Allan. "I think my father bought it for about £1,500. At the time, we employed about 50 people, and most of the wood was supplied locally. I remember buying poles for brush handles from Wimpole."

"But then came the slump and business went down rapidly in 1928 or 29. Eventually the site was bought by W G Pye and they built the Granta Works there."

The brush company's new site was the one in Searle Street. It was let during the war and opened up again in 1946. Until then it had been

the builder's yard of Charlie Newman but had a much more illustrious background.

The wooden buildings were originally built for Playfair and the name "Playfair Works" can still just be traced in old paintwork. The company made rackets for tennis and other sports.

In the early 1890s, the factory was taken over by H J Gray and Son, who became one of the country's leading makers of tennis rackets and cricket bats and still have a shop in Cambridge.

The premises have not been modernised and methods of making brushes here by hand has not changed in more than 40 years.