



Allan Riley is in the process of closing Allan Aquariums after 57 years at the same site in Bury St Edmunds

Picture by Mark Westley

'I didn't think I'd spend my life making fish tanks'

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After 57 years at the same site, a Bury St Edmunds business is in the process of closing down.

John Allan Aquariums was a trailblazer when interest in the then new hobby of fishkeeping exploded in the 1960s.

In September 1963, brothers John and Allan Riley started making aquariums from a shed at their mum's Edmonton home.

Swamped with orders, within weeks they needed more space and moved into a garage rented from their local butcher.

They almost immediately outgrew the butcher's garage so wrote to London County Council, asking for a railway arch or industrial premises.

The council swiftly replied saying there was no space in the city, but instead dispatched a Mr Bramson to Edmonton, charged with finding them a workshop in one of the new or expanding towns outside London.

Their search took in Witham and Thetford before arriving in Bury St Edmunds.

Mr Bramson believed in the brothers' business idea, persuaded the council to give them a chance and the rest is history.

They were promised a workshop in Eastern

Way – at that time little more than a road into the industrial estate was built – and a council house each.

On August 16, 1964, Allan moved into his new home in Oliver Road with little more than a bed.

On Monday, August 17, he and John – used to London traffic – left Oliver Road at 7am in order to get to their new workshop in time for opening at 8am.

"We got there at 7.05am as, of course, there was no traffic," said Allan, now 82.

The lack of traffic proved to be a bonus, as in the early days the brothers and their 15-year-old apprentice worked until midnight most days.

"We never looked back – it was go go go," said Allan.

"We recruited more staff and kept on growing. Here we are, 57 years later. I didn't think at the start I would spend my life making fish tanks."

As keeping fish grew in popularity, business boomed until the late 1990s, when the industry as a whole began to decline.

Now, Allan is in the process of closing the firm and looking forward to some sort of retirement, although he hopes he will keep himself busy.

Hazells is selling the freehold of 34 Eastern Way for £625,000. For details, call 01284 702626.

In brief

Man left with broken nose after assault in town

A man was left with a broken nose after he was set upon by three boys.

Police were called shortly after 8pm on Tuesday following reports of a man having been assaulted near Mildenhall Football Club by a group of three boys on bikes. One of the boys punched the man in the face, breaking his nose.

A police spokesperson said any witnesses should contact them quoting CAD reference 372 of 17 August 2021.

Take a tour of town's pubs

There's a chance to go on a 'pub crawl' around Bury St Edmunds without touching a drop of the hard stuff when local historian Martyn Taylor gives a talk on the town's inns and alehouses past and present at The Guildhall at 10.30am tomorrow.

Tickets – available from burystedmundsguildhall.org.uk – cost £8 with proceeds going to The Guildhall.



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