

## Memories from Tom Truss. Works Engineer.

(As recorded in "50 years of Octel" published in 1988)

In the run up to the first production of bromine at Amlwch on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1953, Cliff Rees was the works manager. There were constant targets to be met with buildings to be completed, equipment to be installed and pre-commissioned. Cliff Rees was a real task master and had a bedroom next to his office. However because of his leadership we all did everything that was expected off us.



Cliff Rees

When he could see that we had reached the end of our tether we would all go to the Dinorben for a drink. Cliff would go around asking what we were drinking. But whatever you said you got a pint or Worthington's E, because that's what he drank.

When commissioning started at Amlwch people would spend two or three days on site without going home. They would settle down and have a sleep somewhere on site when time allowed. Favourite places were the stretchers in the safety centre, behind the boilers in the boiler house or in the County Ambulance. However the last one could be an issue if the ambulance was needed off site and you had a long walk back.

No one outside Amlwch town was considered for employment in those days and even senior staff had to live within 10 miles of the site. It was essential to be within easy reach and you were continually being called in and transport was mainly by bicycle. Eventually we got canteen facilities available during the day. If we were working after hours someone would be conscripted to get the canteen keys from the gatehouse and raid the food stored to fix something up for the rest of the workers to eat.

We had all sorts of minor trades going on at the site in the early days. The chemical plumber was also the site barber. Everyone had their hair cut by him. He worked in the instrument shop which had a good view point because of its windows. If the foreman appeared in the distance, the scissors and comb would disappear into the plumber bag and the person concerned leave the shop with only a ½ finished cut. They were often charged a second time to have the cut completed.

The exhaust gases from the plants used to go through spray catchers on the top of the BOT and the Absorbers. The fumes were monitored to try and give the operators a fair crack of the whip in controlling them. To get the plant off the ground the process lab boys would go to the top of the spray catchers, take readings and hold up big placards with numbers on to show the operators in the control room 300 yards away. Of course if the lab boys disappeared in a cloud of fume the operators knew they had too much SO<sub>2</sub> on and would be due a telling off when a lab boy, struggling to breathe, came through the control room door.

There were lots of maintenance problems but the safety record was good due to the training we all received. The inter-Works Safety and Good housing keeping record was keenly contested when first introduced in 1955. Amlwch won the shield 4 times in the first 5 years. On 17<sup>th</sup> December 1959 Amlwch achieved one million man hours worked without a lost time accident. In March 1963 this had increased to two million. This record continued until the July with a total of 2,089,601 man hours worked without a LTA.

The technical staff made sure that we never had any major incidents. We also had the experience of Archie Mac George and Alec Beech, who had transferred from the bromine plant at Hayle to provide assistance. Alec Beech was a truly old style foreman. A bowler hatted type you couldn't sneeze without his permission. He had a wealth of experience having worked at both Hayle and Amlwch.



Alec Beech 1968 with Cliff Rees and John Kennerly

Despite the hard work involved at the plant many workers also found time to volunteer for other activities. The County Ambulance was manned and maintained by Amlwch workers. Murley Francis a tradesman assistant was second coxswain to the Moelfre lifeboat and was awarded a medal for a rescue in 1959 while his brother Jabez was on the coast gaud team the same night. Ten years later Murley became Coxswain at Moelfre.