

Historic day as Aughinish produces first granules of an alumina mountain

- September 24, 1983: alumina produced for first time after £650m investment
- 'We're extremely pleased with the quality,' says spokesman Cathal O'Shannon

LEADER REPORTER

From the edition of October 1, 1983

AUGHINISH Alumina Ltd turned out the first granules of an alumina mountain on Saturday last [September 24].

The alumina is now piling up at the Aughinish site, ready for export.

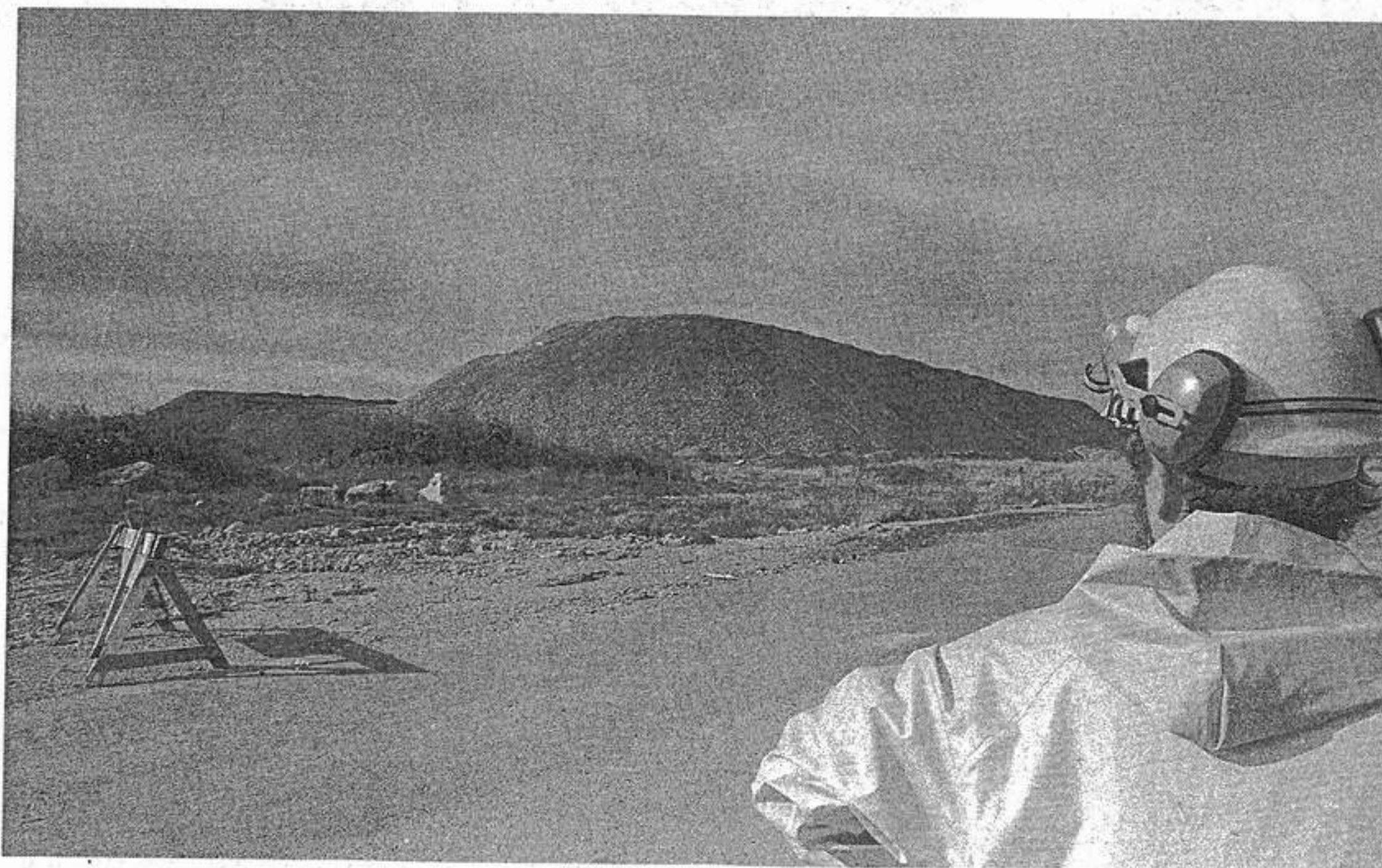
The £650 million plant is turning out top quality raw material for the alumina smelters it will supply throughout the world.

Bauxite ore shipped in from West Africa was fed into the system and after making a 100 mile journey through the plant's piping system via huge digestors, the red ore became white, salt-like powder.

Said AAL public affairs manager, Mr Cathal O'Shannon this week: "The first alumina came through into the storage bins last Saturday and already we have 500 tons built up. We are really very pleased and everyone has done a magnificent job. We are extremely pleased at the quality of the alumina."

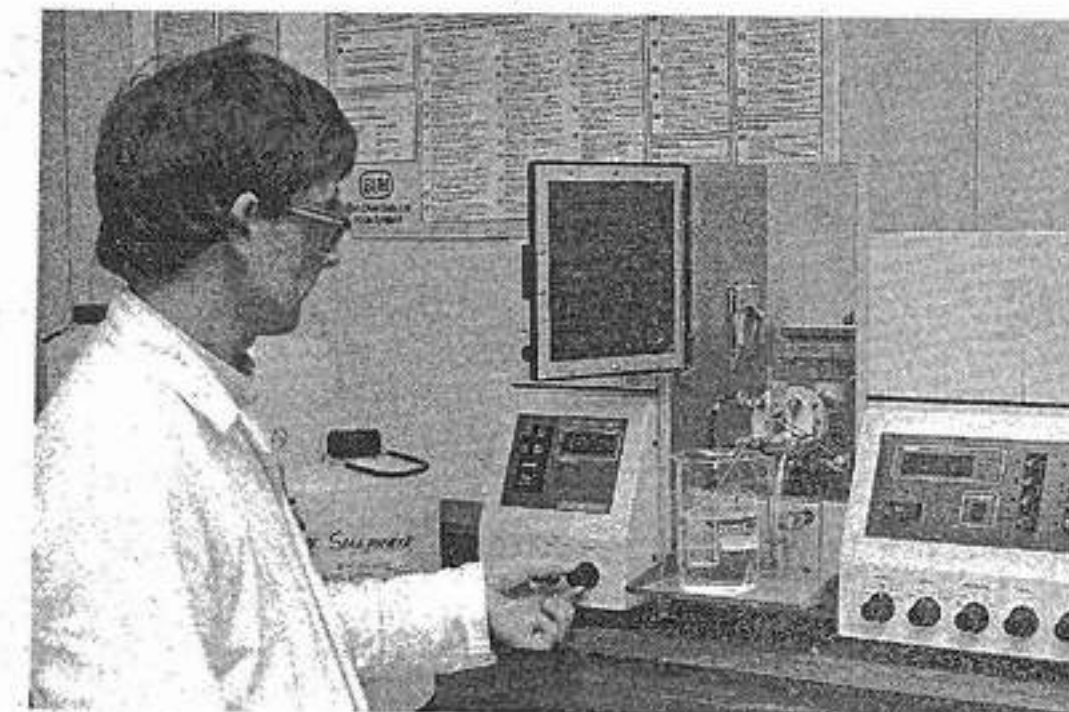
At full production the plant will process 1.6 million tons of bauxite each year into 800,000 tons of alumina.

The Minister for Industry and Energy, Mr John Bruton, will officially mark the start-up production of alumina when he visits the island on October 28th.



Within days of the first batch of alumina being produced, a small mountain of it was piling up on Aughinish island, ready to be exported worldwide

Team Aughinish: some of the key people in 1983



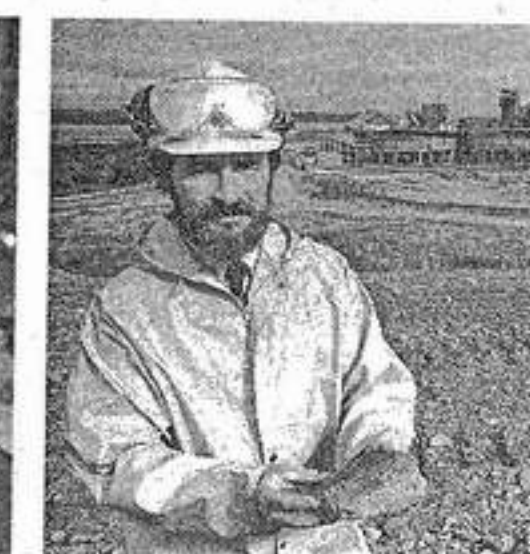
John Carmody, chemical analyst, working on atomic absorption in the lab at Aughinish Alumina. The equipment was state-of-the-art in 1983



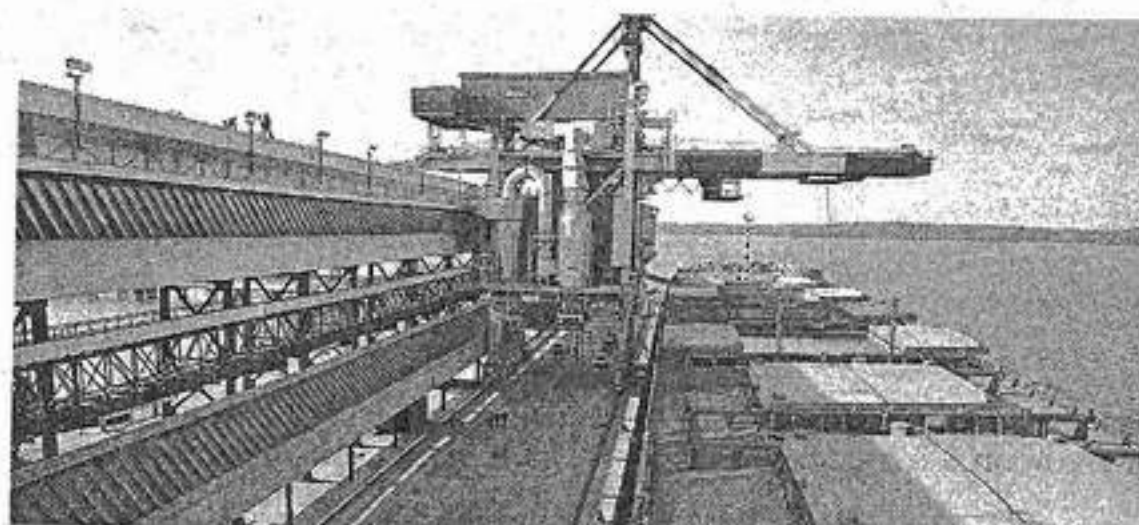
John Cowpar, North Circular Road, working in the sample prep lab where the water content is measured in the bauxite



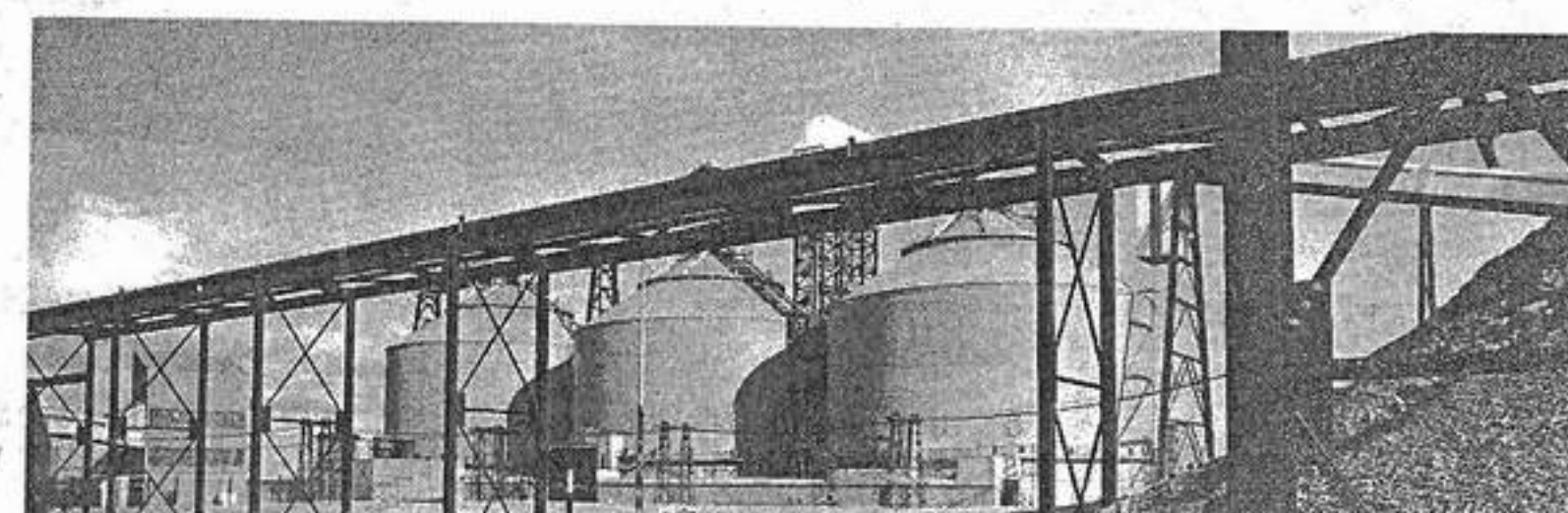
Supervisor Paul Potter, living in Raheen and a native of Queensland



Pat Lynch, who went on to enjoy a long career at Aughinish



Left: the Limerick Leader was on hand to capture a moment of local history as Michael Lally, right, assistant lab manager and environmentalist, along with John Quirke, operations

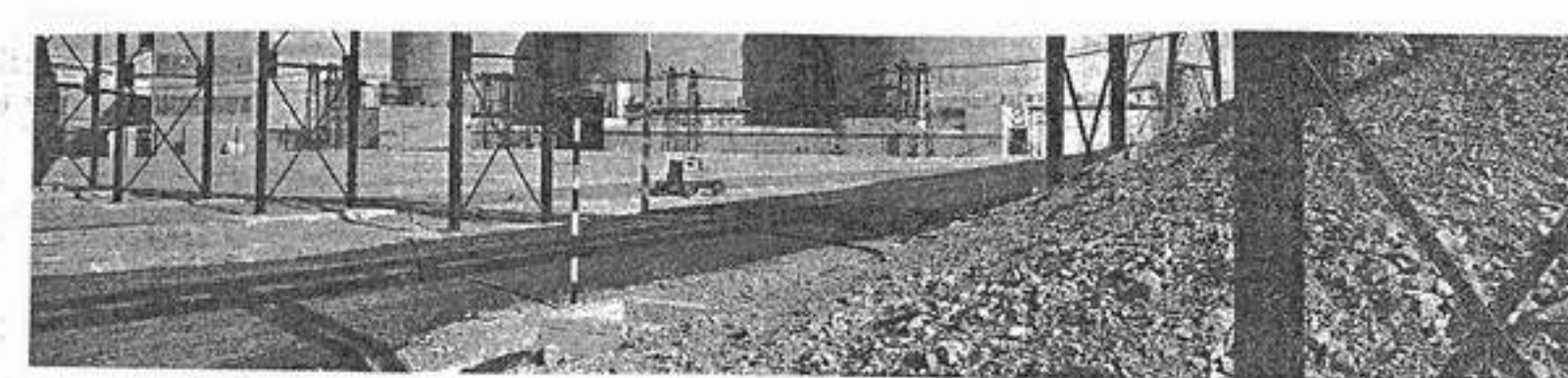




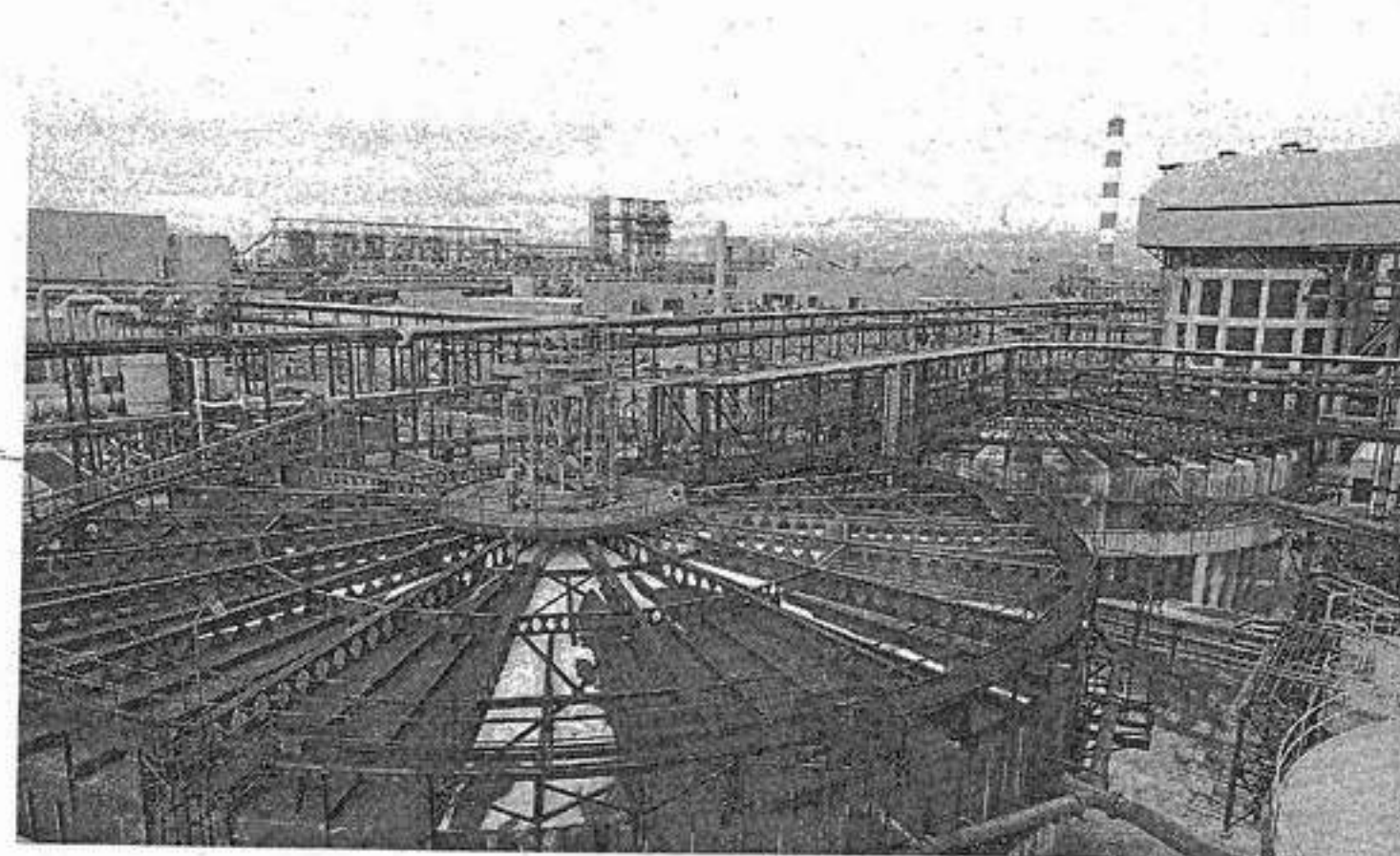
Pictured in September 1983, part of the £650 million investment made to transport alumina produced in west Limerick to destinations worldwide



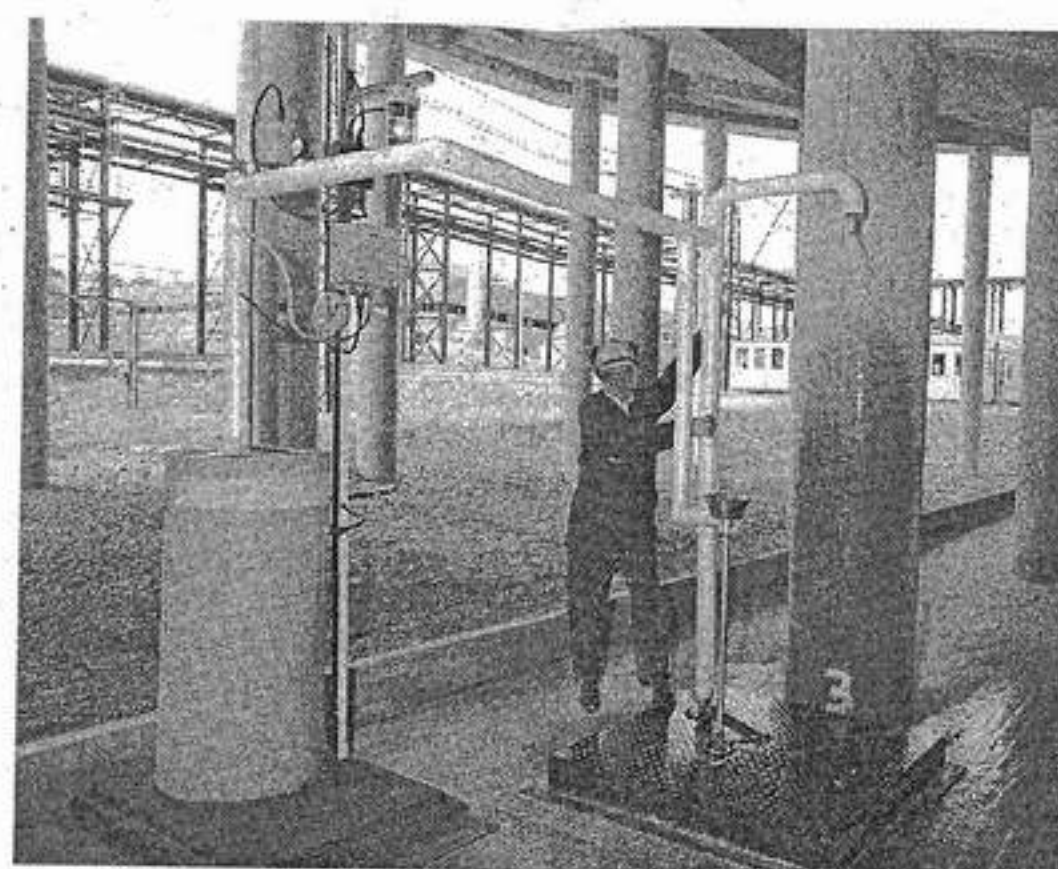
along with John Quirke, operations supervisor, inspected the first batch of alumina powder to be produced at the Aughinish Alumina plant



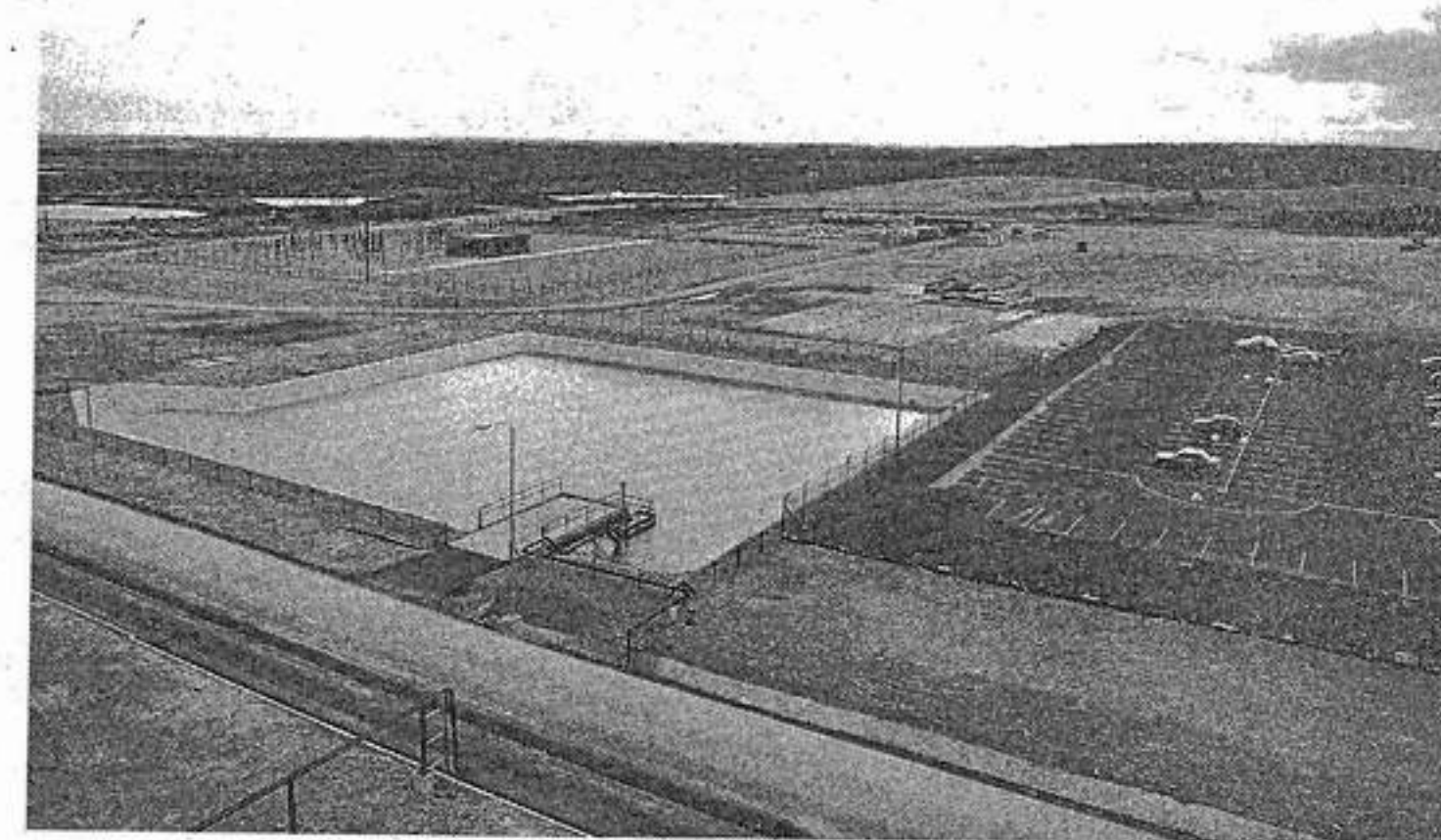
The Leader photographed the Aughinish plant from almost every perspective 30 years ago this month



An interesting view of the vast infrastructure supporting the production of alumina at Aughinish



David McCoy, from Newcastle West, a maintenance fitter at the plant making one of his monthly maintenance checks on the safety showers



All quiet on Limerick's western front, with not too many cars parked in the ample spaces

'Development of national and regional significance'

PADDY MORONEY

From the edition of November 9, 1983

OVER £300 million - about half the total cost of building the Alcan project - was spent in Ireland. Mr John Bruton, Minister for Industry and Energy, said on a visit to the plant last weekend.

This investment was not only on construction work, he told a large gathering of visiting dignitaries, but also on wages, goods and services.

"In all, some 265 Irish companies were involved as contractors or suppliers to the company," he revealed.

His visit marked the start-up of production at the industry on Aughinish Island which is now processing about 1,500 tonnes of alumina a day. Total production is for export to smelters abroad: it takes two tonnes of alumina to manufacture one tonne of aluminum.

The Minister for Justice, Mr Michael Noonan, and Fianna Fail frontbencher, Mr Gerry Collins were among the the very large contingent of visitors.

Continued Mr Bruton: "Employment at Aughinish is already in excess of 700, and is well on its way to achieving the total of nearly 800 jobs that will be provided in the project."

He welcomed the fact that the largest proportion of jobs would be at professional, technical and highly skilled



Dr Ed Walsh, president of NIHE, shares a light moment with Michael Noonan, Minister for Justice back in 1983

level - "a development of very considerable, national and regional significance."

A spokesman for Alcan later revealed that the monthly payroll for staff was £1 million.

The Minister went on: "There is also the very important fact that Aughinish Alumina which, at full production will be exporting some 800,000 tonnes of alumina per annum, will soon be a major contributor to our

much needed export earnings." It was learned later that this production would benefit Ireland's balance of trade by some £35 million a year.

Mr Bruton concluded: "If Irish industry is to survive and prosper in the present environment of rapid technological development, it is essential that its workforce - management as well as shop floor - should have available to it

the best education and training possible.

"Aughinish Alumina have, I understand, already taken the praiseworthy step of sponsoring courses at N.I.H.E."

Mr Fred Barker, managing director of Aughinish Alumina Ltd, had much to say about the industrial relations problem which bedevilled the early days of construction work.

"In our second year," he told

a luncheon at the company's administrative building, "we had a number of unofficial strikes, some lasting a matter of hours, some a few days, some a week or more. In the five years of construction, there was never an official strike at Aughinish."

Mr Barker's comments amounted to a farewell address, as he is now retiring to Canada.

He continued: "The rash of unofficial strikes could not be

allowed to continue, and they were, in fact, not just delaying the completion of the project but threatening its future. So we closed construction down until the matter could be sorted out. And it was sorted out. Industrial relations moved along pretty smoothly after that because of our strong, but fair management and an understanding by the trade unions of their problems and ours."

He added: "In the three intervening years between August 1980, and the completion of construction this year, the site was never again closed down by industrial dispute."

He praised the present workforce: "It is not secret that, ten days ago, start-up had to be temporarily shut down because of a fault in one of our storage silos. That is no reflection on our operation workforce here at Aughinish. On the contrary, for the past number of weeks, they have been producing alumina of a very high quality indeed. Their training, their adaptability, their capabilities have shown us that the quality of their work is the highest."

"Unfortunately," Mr Barker observed, "a little thing like a recession got in the way. Many of the alumina plants were built, or nearly built, when the recession hit, forcing many smelter projects to be deferred or abandoned altogether."

"Japan is an example: more

than one million tonnes of smelting capacity has been shut down in that country, probably never to see the light of day again."

Aughinish Alumina, he concluded, had been built for the long term. "In recent months," he said, "we have seen a decided upturn in demand for aluminum, particularly in the United States."

The achievement of the company is managing to open the Aughinish plant, in the face of the world recession and closures of similar plants elsewhere, was outlined by Mr Eric West, chairman of Aughinish Alumina Ltd.

"It has been a long road, and sometimes a difficult road," he said. "The size and risk of the project and the changing fortunes of our industry over the period since it came off the drawing board, resulted in a hesitant start to the project and some tough hurdles along the way."

But he went on: "We are helped by the best technology in the world; however, the task will be made difficult by the present over-supply of alumina in the world."

This surplus, he explained, resulted from a combination of factors, principal of which was the number of new alumina projects which had been built in expectation of heavy demands for aluminium.



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AUGHINISH SPECIAL

13

A proud son of Aughinish looks back: Liam's life as islander and employee

■ His family home had to make way for the giant alumina plant, but it meant Liam Dundon had work on his doorstep from the very beginning

NORMA PRENDIVILLE

"I AM an island man. On Aughinish, we always called ourselves an island people," says Liam Dundon who was born on Aughinish island and whose family home was one of several which had to go to make way for the giant alumina plant that is now Rusal Aughinish.

The name, he explains, means island of the steeds or of the horses, partly because of its horse-head shape but also because the limestone land was good for horses. And it remained an island until about 1800 when the first bridge, which is still standing, was built.

Growing up an islander did mark them out as different, Liam acknowledges. But it was, in his mind, a good difference. It was a place apart, a place where fishing and shooting were the order of the seasons, where there was great community spirit and where there were great gatherings of neighbours with nights of singing and dancing and music. And he remembers being carried home on his father's shoulders from such gatherings.

Aughinish people, Liam says, had poetry in them. "A lot of them composed songs," he recalls. And he traces a line between an Aughinish family and the poet James Clarence Mangan.

It was a closely knit community. Even now, Liam can name all the 10 families who lived on the island when he was a boy: the O'Shaughnessys, the Mulcairs, the other Dundons, the Guerins, the two families of Mangans, and the Walls.

"It was like an independent republic," he says. "We depended on fishing in the summer back in the 1940s and 1950s. And in the autumn we waited for the return of the woodcock and of the wild geese. The wild goose was a great source of food. You couldn't eat better. It would feed a family for two days. In the summertime, we had rabbits."

And then there was fishing. "The best way to catch fish was to go up one of the creeks with a three-pronged pike. We would stand two or three across in a line prodding along, then throw them on to the bank."

"We didn't have much but what we had was fresh and organic."

As the eldest of six, Liam learned from his father, Tim, a man who was



Liam Dundon, pictured at the plant this week by Michael Cowhey, says there was 'massive money being earned' in the construction years. As a supervisor in that time, he had 52 men under his charge and targets were tight. 'I didn't take a holiday for two years,' he recalls

multi-talented, a man who could plough with two horses, who was a herdsman, a repairer of shoes for his island people, a thatcher. The family lived for many years in a long thatched house until the storm of 1966 blew the thatch east and made the house uninhabitable, Liam explains. They then moved to a cottage and acre close to the bridge.

And it was from this house, in 1977, that the family sold up and left.

Before that though, the Dundons - like so many other families - had known emigration. Liam himself left in 1959, at the age of 19, heading like so many more before him to London.

Leaving the island was hard, Liam

acknowledges. "You were heartbroken, having to leave and having to go and work in a concrete jungle," he says simply.

But Croydon, where his first job was as a trainee barman, wasn't the worst. It had green spaces. Shortly after, he secured an apprenticeship in fitting and welding and worked his trade for many years in the city - but always he was determined he would return home one day.

That chance did not come for a long 14 years - until 1973 when a job as a maintenance fitter/welder came up at Tarbert Power Station, which was being rebuilt. Other work followed in other

parts of Ireland but then, in 1977, the IDA began buying up land on Aughinish for what was destined to become the single biggest industrial complex ever built in the state, Aughinish Alumina.

But, Liam recalls, his father didn't want to leave and he certainly didn't want to leave at the price that was being offered for the house and land. And when the threat of a compulsory purchase order came, the family was ready to go to the High Court.

But with just days to do, a settlement was arrived at and the Dundons, along with other families, packed up all their belongings in a few trailers and left the island.

They moved just a few miles away to a new house in a field Liam's father knew well, having ploughed it throughout most of his life. And they settled there.

For Liam, himself, the issue was one of jobs. This was progress, he felt, with a big multinational coming to the area. If it meant he could get a job at home, and end his days of travelling for work, he was all for it.

And fairly soon, he got his wish. Building work at Aughinish began in 1978 and Liam was there. "Jack Lynch drove a bulldozer through a wall and that was the start of it," he says, recalling that red-letter day, with its huge marquee, thronged with VIPs and TDs and the nation's press in attendance.

Throughout the construction, there was "massive money being earned" and Liam was fortunate in being in there, as a supervisor with 52 men under his charge.

Targets were tight, he says, and the pressure was on. "I didn't take a holiday for two years," he adds. But in March 1983, the construction work was over, commissioning had begun and in September 1983, production finally began, as we recount on these pages.

Liam was not an employee at that stage but a few months later, he joined the company's maintenance fitter/welder team and remained with the company until he retired at Christmas 2004. Fortunately for him, a new life then beckoned as wildlife warden on the island, a job he retains to this day.

And he is very conscious of life having come full circle - as his job involves walking the roads and trails of the island he wandered as a lad. He liaises with the neighbourhood groups, welcomes school and other groups to the island's wildlife sanctuaries, keeps in touch with Birdwatch Ireland and works with botanists in relation to relocating protected species. He also keeps an eye on the six kilometres or so of nature trails and on the pond-life in the island's two turlough lakes. "I photograph wildlife and plant life on the island through all the seasons," he says.

But he retains the photographs he has of Aughinish before the alumina plant, of its homes and people. And he has a mind to write the history of the island, someday soon.

1983: JIM FEELS RIGHT AT HOME



As part of the coverage on the official opening ceremony 30 years ago, the Leader spoke to the late Jim Dundon, who like his cousin Liam (see story opposite) grew up on Aughinish Island and then went to work there.

Mr Jim Dundon, test engineer with Aughinish Alumina Ltd, found work on his very doorstep - literally. The cottage on Aughinish Island where he was born, and where he lived the best part of his 41 years, was only recently demolished to make way for the final stage in the construction of the giant plant. He had emigrated to Canada where he studied at university to become a non-destructive test engineer, outside his normal working hours. He returned to Ireland "on spec", as he put it, to find a job. But a stroke of sheer luck, he got a job on the construction work at Aughinish, only yards from his front door. Now employed by the Alcan company itself, he is living at Kilcornan, near Pallaskenry.

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Early challenges: A moving silo ... and goats roaming free on Aughinish Island

LIMERICK LEADER
OCTOBER 15, 1983

Wanted: Miracle man at AAL site

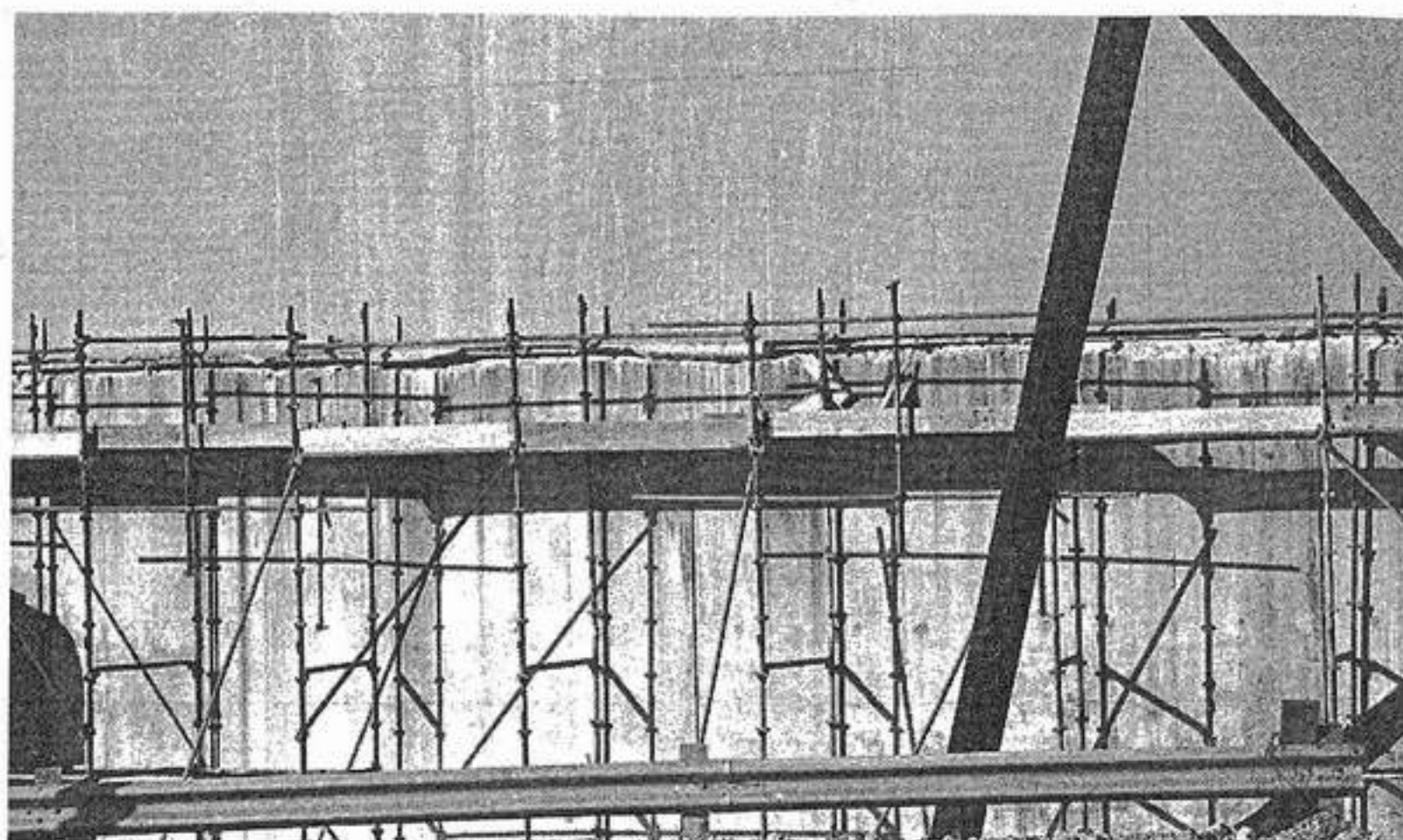
AUGHINISH Alumina are hoping for a "miracle man" in the eight experts from four countries due at the plant this Friday to inspect the movement discovered in one of the three giant steel storage tanks earlier this week which has brought production to a virtual standstill.

Mr Cathal O'Shannon, public relations manager for the £650 million investment on the Shannon Estuary, told the Limerick Leader that the experts were unlikely to diagnose the problem overnight and that it would be late into next week before they could offer a serious preliminary judgment.

"Naturally we are hoping for a miracle man - somebody who might say, 'Here lads, this is the problem,'" said a none too optimistic Mr O'Shannon, who added that to comment on possible lay-offs at the plant would be pure speculation at this stage. Though only one silo is affected at the moment it has been decided to shut down the other two which are of the same design so that a thorough inspection can be made on them for any possible defects.

"It is very difficult to say when production might start up again," continued Mr. O'Shannon, who intimated that plans to bring Minister for Industry, Mr John Bruton, to officially start production in two weeks' time may have to be postponed.

Silo No 1 developed a fault on Monday when it was discovered that some movement of steel which sits on the round concrete base had taken place. This made the silo potentially unstable for further production.



A close up of the problem area that caused production to be briefly halted early in October 1983. The picture shows a white line of grouting between one of the silos and its concrete base

The area surrounding the three silos has been cordoned off as a safety measure. Each of the silos holds 25,000 tons of the fine white alumina processed from bauxite.

When Mr O'Shannon was asked if repair work could be carried out locally, he replied: "Most unlikely - it all depends on the extent of the problem but to my way of thinking any repair work will have to be carried out by an outside firm."

Each of the three silos measures 32 metres high, having 22,000 metric tons of steel tankage. They are capable of holding 75,000 tons of alumina between them.

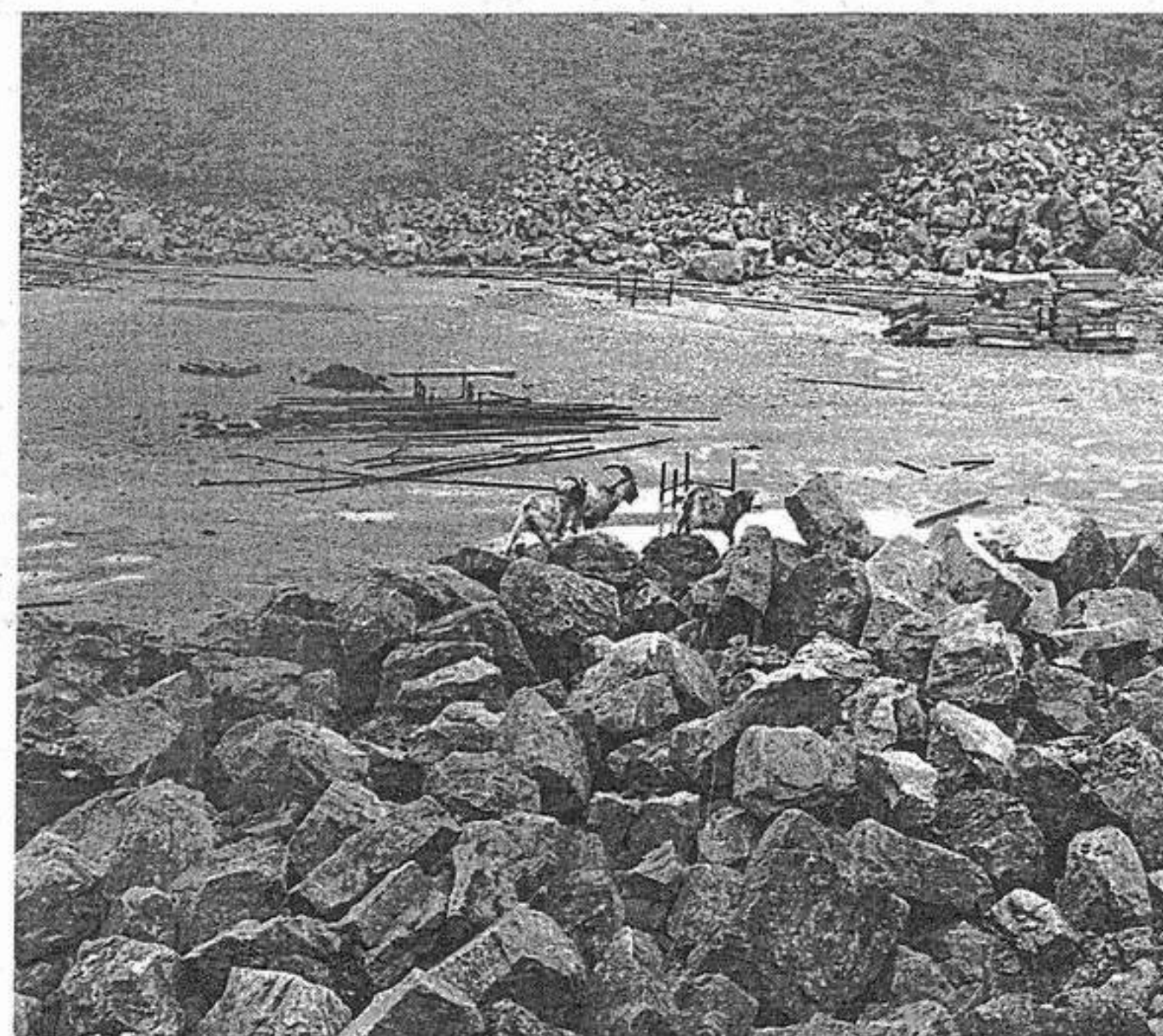
Since production started Aughinish Alumina has been turning out 1,500 tons of

alumina a day. The first shipment of alumina will take place as planned next week, but future shipments will depend on how quickly the damage to the silo can be diagnosed.

Upwards of 720 people are employed at the plant.

Postscript - Limerick Leader, October 22, 1983: The first shipment of alumina from Aughinish Alumina took place this Wednesday [October 19].

Production was back to normal this week following the stabilisation of one of the three giant steel storage tanks. The Aughinish Alumina plant will be officially opened this Friday by the Minister for Industry and Energy, Mr John Bruton [see report on opposite page].



Wandering free: a herd of wild goats at the disused quarry at Aughinish, before being moved to a farm. Below - Here's looking at you, kid: the goats are clearly intrigued by the Limerick Leader photographer!

LIMERICK LEADER, JANUARY 14, 1984

No goat-acting with major local industry

A HERD of wild goats on Aughinish Island have put gardening staff with Aughinish Alumina Ltd in a right "pucker". The goats have been eating shrubs and sapling trees, wreaking havoc with landscaping efforts.

But now in an effort to save the young trees and shrubs the goats are being rounded up and transported to Carrickerry, where they will join the goat herd of Joe Ahern.

"It was a case of either the trees or the goats and

the only way we could save the trees was to remove the goats," explained Mr Pat Lynch of the company's public affairs section. He revealed that the goats were in fact on the Island before construction commenced on Aughinish Island in 1978.

"They are feral goats and are descendants of one-time domesticated goats. There are other goats on another part of the island but they don't come onto our land," explained Mr Lynch.

He said they were delighted that they found a home for the goats where they would be put to productive use.

"Joe Ahern already has a small herd himself and he has literally half the side of a mountain to graze them on - so our goats will be well looked after," remarked the AAL man. He also revealed that they had a difficult job rounding up the first batch of goats to be sent to Carrickerry before Christmas.

"We engaged the help of youngsters from Askeaton and Kilkernan who helped us herd the goats into a small corral before we moved the goats to Carrickerry on Christmas Eve," he said.

It is hoped that the remaining four pucks on the island can be moved shortly from the disused quarry where they are at present, to Ahern's farm.



Situations Vacant: With production under way, new jobs are advertised in Leader

Page 12 LIMERICK LEADER, 14 OCTOBER 1983

APPOINTMENTS

Aughinish Alumina Limited has just commenced production at its modern high technology alumina plant on Aughinish Island, Co. Limerick.

Accounts Payable Supervisor

You will be responsible for the plant's efficient payment of multi-currency invoices using our computer-based control system. You, with a small team, will handle our high volume of transactions to total value of £650 million per annum.

You need to have proved yourself in a busy accounting environment having a minimum of 5 years' supervisory experience in accounts payable. Use of a computer-based system would be an added advantage.

An attractive starting salary including generous removal allowances are offered.

If you can meet the challenge, please write giving full career details, quoting reference number SP10 to: **S. Cahill, Staff Manager, Aughinish Alumina Ltd., Aughinish Island, Askeaton.**

Boiler House Operators

Ltd. is due to start its modern high technology alumina plant on Aughinish Island, Co. Limerick. With the heavy duty start-up which provides a 250 psi from 3 in to recruit a Boiler House Operator.

You will have a minimum of 3 years' experience in operating with the operation of medium to large size industrial boilers, although preference will be given to those with boiler house experience, heavy chemical industrial or similar process experience. You must be prepared to work shifts.

Shift	Hours	Rate
Day shift	40 hours	£146.00
2 shift	40 hours	£171.55
3 shift	40 hours	£179.17
4 shift	44 hours	£214.08

*These rates are under review at present.

Because of the wide range of instrumentation and equipment at the plant, all positions - which are open to both men and women - will offer the opportunity for extensive training.

If you would like one of these jobs, you should apply quoting the reference number AHD 34 L.L. to: **N. F. O'Dwyer, Aughinish Alumina Ltd., Aughinish Island, Askeaton, Co. Limerick. Tel: (0611) 49488.**

Closing date for applications: 9th September, 1983.

Occupational Health Nurse

Aughinish Alumina Ltd is due to start production at its very modern high technology alumina plant on Aughinish Island, Co. Limerick.

In order to support a continuous medical service on the plant, becomes operational we now require an Occupational Health Nurse who will report to the Senior Occupational Health Nurse. The person will work in our spacious well equipped Occupational Health Centre and must be prepared to work shifts.

The person we are seeking will have an RGN or equivalent qualification with at least 3 years post qualification experience. At least 2 years experience in occupational health is desirable.

Experience in any of the following areas would be a decided advantage:

- Occupational Health - Marine
- Administration
- Safety benefits and working conditions will be attractive for the right person. Please apply quoting the reference number CHN 34 L.L. to: **N. F. O'Dwyer.**

After years of planning, the beginning of production at Aughinish in September 1983 meant the plant had a need for new members of staff. Vacancies appeared in the Limerick Leader regularly in those early months of production. Boiler house operators were among those sought by the company and the going rate for a 40-hour week was £146 for day work. Those happy to do shift work were more generously remunerated, with £214.08 on offer for four shifts amounting to a total of 44 hours. These rates, it said in the Leader ad, were 'under review'