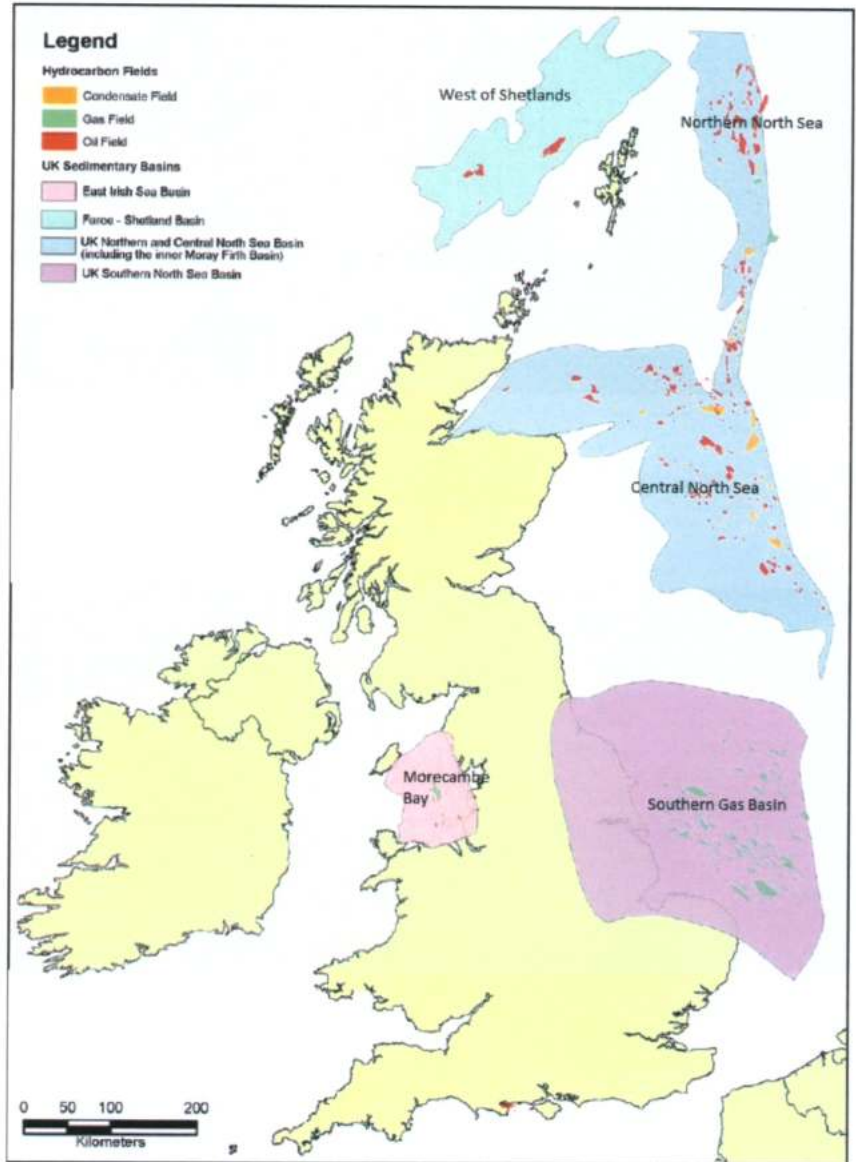


UKCS Oil and Gas

The international oil industry first took an interest in UK and Norwegian waters after the discovery of natural gas in the Netherlands in 1959. The new field was very large and stimulated interest in geological structures onshore, and beneath the North Sea. First offshore drilling took place in Dutch waters in 1961, and in 1962 both the UK and Norwegian governments received the first applications for permission to explore on their continental shelves. On 15 April 1964 the UK passed the Continental Shelf (UKCS) Act which defined sovereignty over the continental shelf and referred to the Petroleum (Production) Act of 1934, which defined rules for granting of licences for exploration and production of petroleum.

Following this act, 53 licences were granted in the first licensing round. Commercial gas was found in the south of the UK sector in 1965 and oil was found in the central and northern North Sea in 1969.

Following appraisal of the field, the West Sole field in the Southern Gas Basin became, in 1967, the first gas field to come on-stream. The first oil fields were Argyll, in the Central, and Forties in the Northern North Sea, both of which came on-stream in 1975.



A souvenir sheet issued in 1974 to commemorate the 15th Anniversary of the discovery of the giant Groningen gas field, centred on Slochteren. The field is the largest natural gas field in Europe. It is operated by Nederlandse Aardolie Maatschappij (NAM), a 50/50 joint venture of Royal Dutch Shell and ExxonMobil.

This Dutch souvenir sheet was not valid for postage.



UKCS Oil and Gas

The BP operated **West Sole** field was the first commercial discovery in the UKCS. Gas production from the field commenced in 1967. The field facilities include 5 production platforms, of which 3 are manned. Gas is sent to the Easington Gas Terminal for processing. Since 2012, West Sole has been operated by Perenco who acquired it, when BP divested their interests in the Southern Gas Basin .

This FDC is postmarked with a West Sole Field, Hull special postmark and has been flown by helicopter. I suspect that it actually travelled from the Forties Field which is 110 miles from Aberdeen, rather than from West Sole, which is 58 miles East of Hull.



UKCS Oil and Gas

The Government Department particularly involved with the UKCS was originally the Department of Trade and Industry. From 1974 this became the Department of Energy. It has since had numerous name changes, and is currently the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy.

The covers below show samples of franking machine impressions used in the 1980's by the Department of Energy. Each has a government department logo, as shown below, on the opening flap.



Logo used at
DOE Aberdeen &
OSO Glasgow.



Logo used at
DOE, Millbank,
London.

UKCS Oil and Gas

The first producing UKCS oil field, **Argyll**, commenced production in June 1975. It produced 72.6 MMBBL (million barrels) over 17 years but was then decommissioned in 1992 as uneconomic. Changing oil economics and improved technology have resulted in redevelopment twice, first as the Ardmore field, which came into production in 2003 and then as the Alma field, on-stream in 2015. The much larger **Forties** field was next into production, in November 1975.

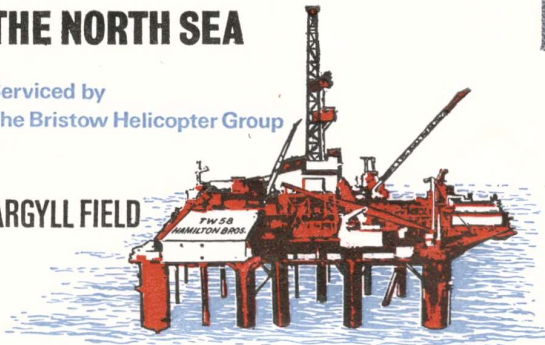
Commemorating the FIRST BRITISH OIL ASHORE



**FROM
THE NORTH SEA**

Serviced by
The Bristow Helicopter Group

ARGYLL FIELD



Developed by Hamilton Bros Oil and Gas Limited

NORTH SEA OIL COMES ASHORE

17 JUN 1975

ABERDEEN

FLIGHT DETAILS
Flown on Routine Crew
Change Flight to
TRANSWORLD-58 OIL RIG
in Bristow Helicopter
S61N G - BAKB
17th June 1975
Capt C Bond Esq
First Offr H Mersey Esq



A. J. E. Hole,
14a Russell Rd.,
LEE-ON-SOLENT,
U.K.

COMMEMORATIVE COVER

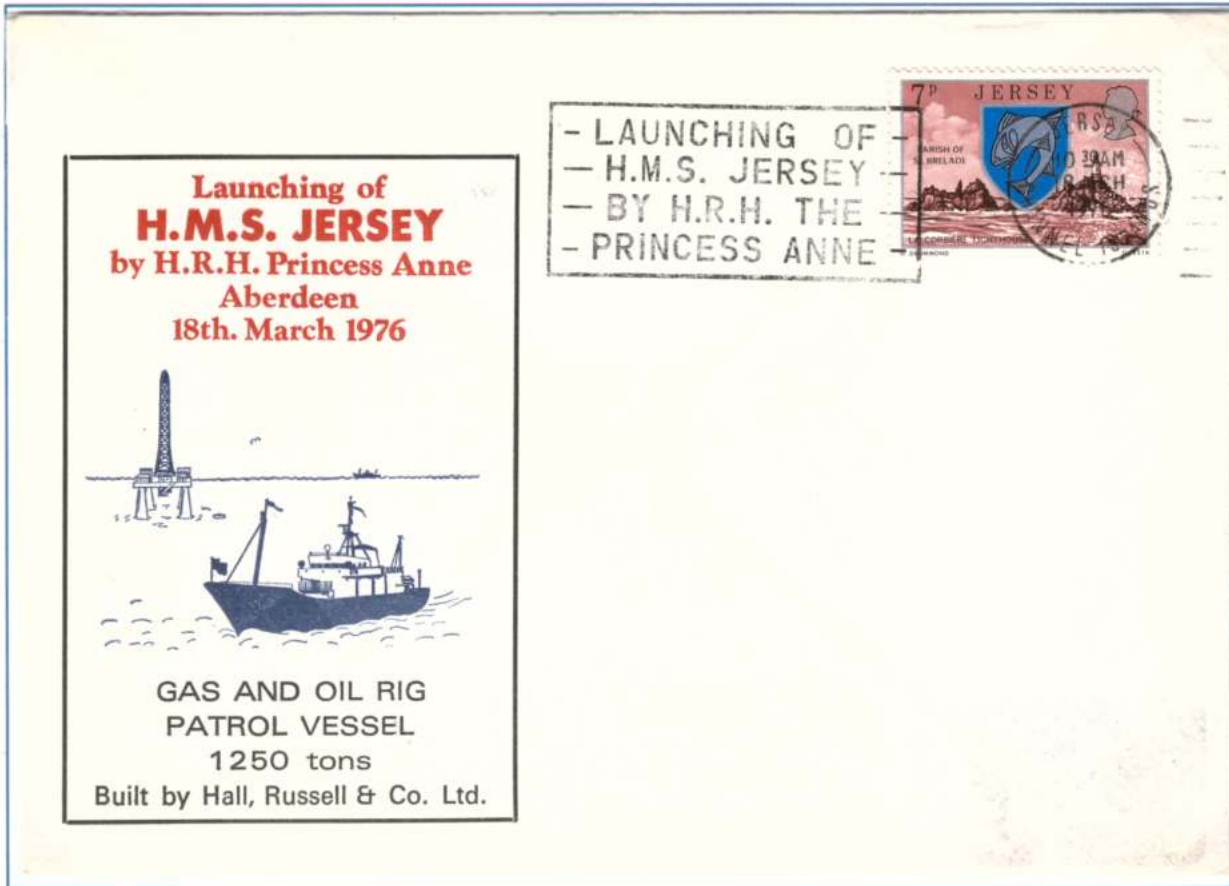


**BP FORTIES FIELD
INAUGURATION
ABERDEEN
3 November 1975**

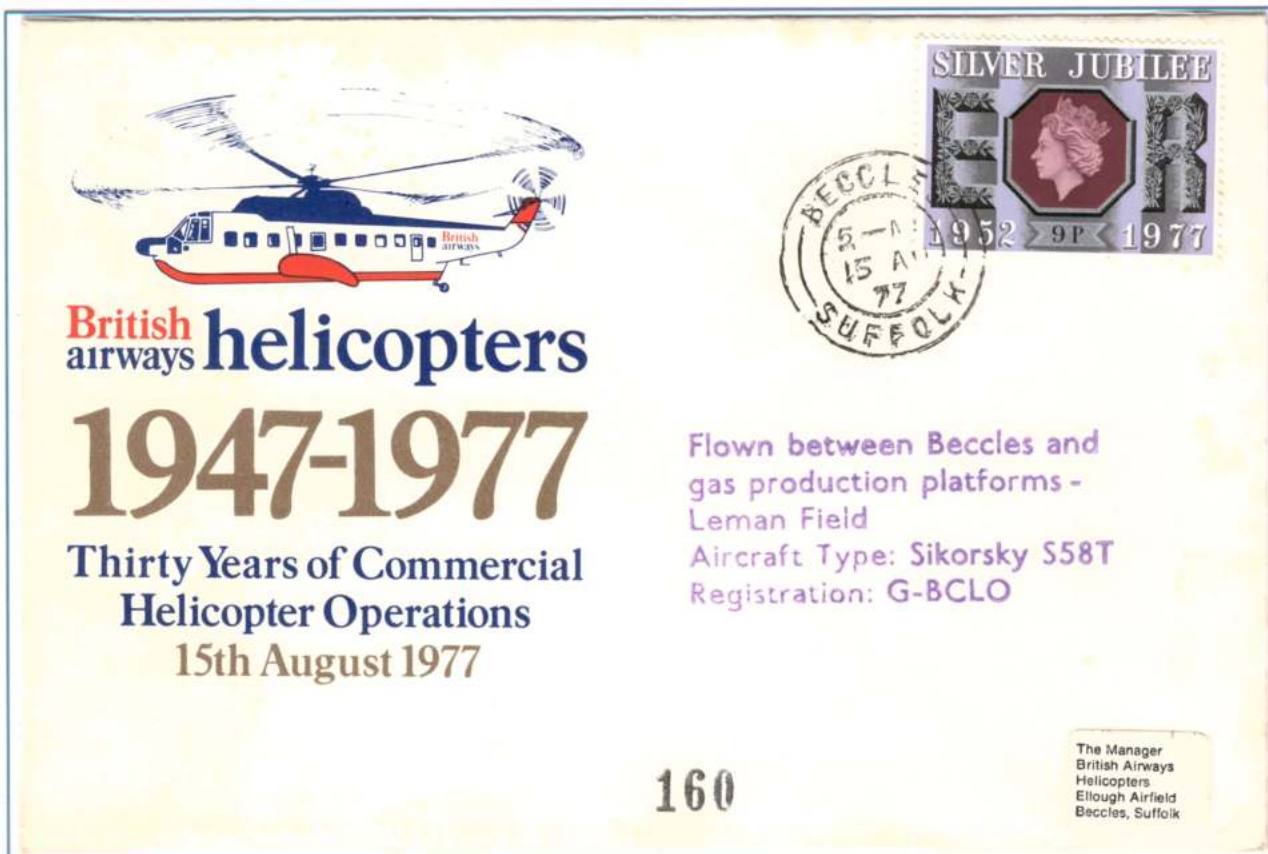
BP FORTIES FIELD INAUGURATION
3 November 1975

UKCS Oil and Gas

HMS Jersey, built in Aberdeen by Hall, Russell & Co, was commissioned in 1976 to provide protection for the platforms of the fledgling offshore industry, as well as for fisheries protection. She was sold to Bangladesh in 1993 as the training ship *BNS Shaheed Ruhul Amin* and has been replaced by modern River-class patrol vessels.




British Airways Helicopters, was one of several companies servicing the oil and gas platforms. They commenced providing offshore support flights in 1965, to the Southern Gas Basin. The cover here was issued to commemorate 30 years of the British Airways business.



UKCS Oil and Gas


British Airways Helicopters flights to support the Central and Northern North Sea fields started in 1967 from Aberdeen, and in 1971 from Sumburgh. The covers here were issued to commemorate 30 years of the British Airways business. This business was sold in 1986 to Maxwell Aviation, and renamed British International Helicopters. Other helicopter operators in the North Sea include CHC Helicopter, Bristow, and Bond Offshore, recently renamed Babcock Mission Critical services Offshore.



**British
airways helicopters**

1947-1977

Thirty Years of Commercial
Helicopter Operations
15th August 1977



Flown between Aberdeen Airport
and offshore oil installations
in the UK North Sea
Aircraft Type: Sikorsky S61N
Registration: G-AYOY

50

The Manager
British Airways
Helicopters
Dyce Airport
Aberdeen



**British
airways helicopters**

1947-1977

Thirty Years of Commercial
Helicopter Operations
15th August 1977



Flown between Sumburgh Airport
and offshore oil installations
in the UK North Sea
Aircraft Type: Sikorsky S61N
Registration: G-ATBJ

126

The Manager
British Airways
Helicopters
Sumburgh Airport
Shetland Isles

UKCS Oil and Gas

The **Forties field**, is the largest oil field in the UKCS. It commenced production in November 1975. By 2003 it had already produced over 2000 MMBBL of oil, when Operatorship was transferred from BP to Apache. At that point remaining recoverable reserves were estimated as 144 MMBBL with decommissioning anticipated to commence in 2013. Apache produced 161 MMBBL by 2011 but located additional reserves in the field, so that recoverable reserves at that point had increased to 174 MMBBL; the anticipated field life has extended to 2033.

This FDC is postmarked with a Forties Field, Aberdeen special postmark and has been flown by helicopter from the field, 110 miles from Aberdeen.

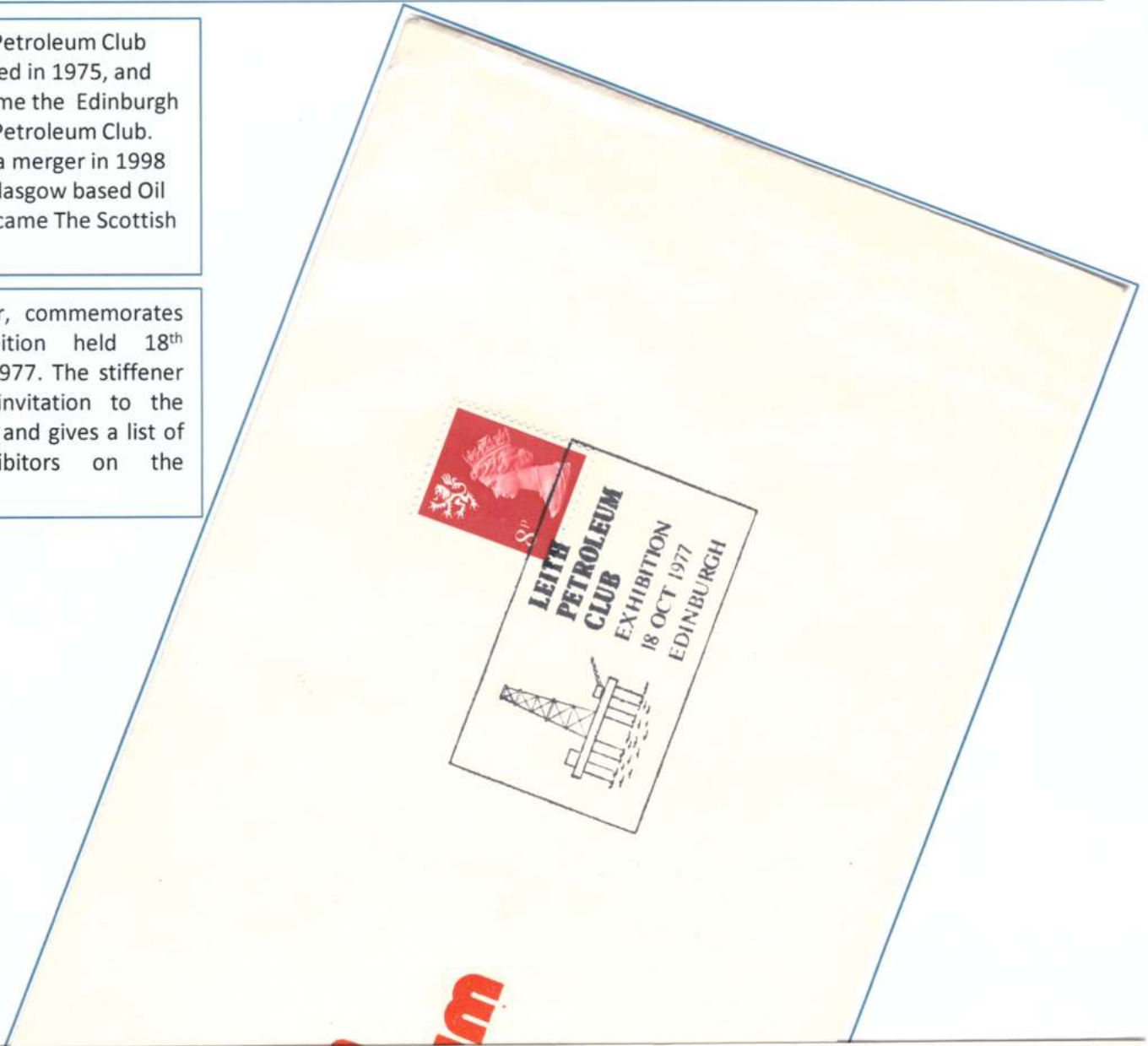


UKCS Oil and Gas

By 1977 the UK oil boom was well under way. Organisations such as the Leith Petroleum Club appeared, to promote the interests of the rapidly increasing number of companies, related to the oil industry

The Leith Petroleum Club was founded in 1975, and soon became the Edinburgh and Leith Petroleum Club. Following a merger in 1998 with the Glasgow based Oil Club, it became The Scottish Oil Club.

This cover, commemorates an exhibition held 18th October 1977. The stiffener was an invitation to the exhibition and gives a list of the exhibitors on the reverse



INVITATION TO ONE-DAY EXHIBITION

LEITH OIL 77

on Tuesday, 18th October 1977 between 10 am and 11 pm
in the Dunedin Suite of the King James Hotel, Edinburgh
(at the top of Leith Walk)

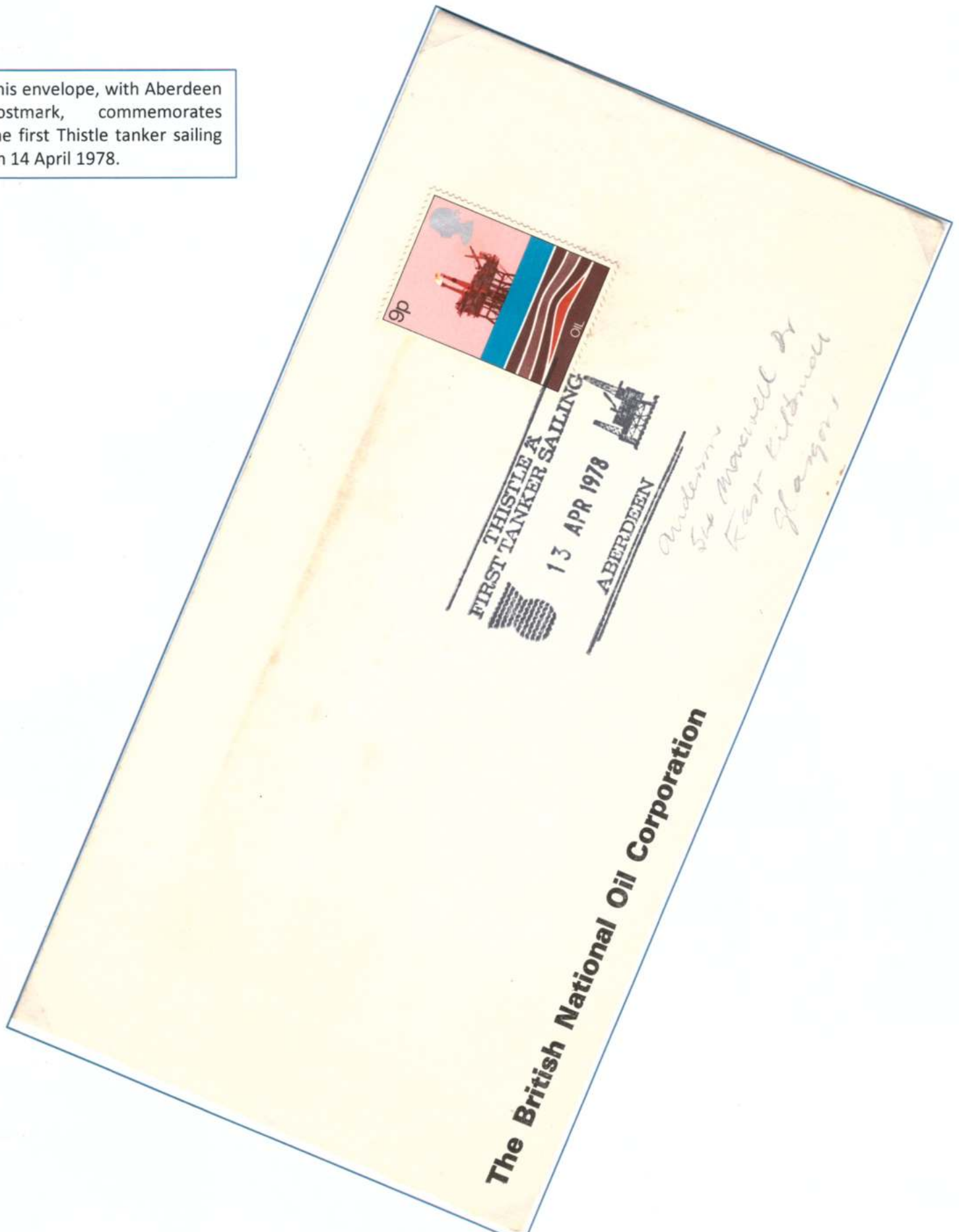
Organised by the LEITH PETROLEUM CLUB to feature the
offshore oil related activities of member companies in the
Forth Valley area.

DR J. DICKSON MABON, MINISTER OF STATE FOR ENERGY
will address the exhibition at about mid-day.

UKCS Oil and Gas

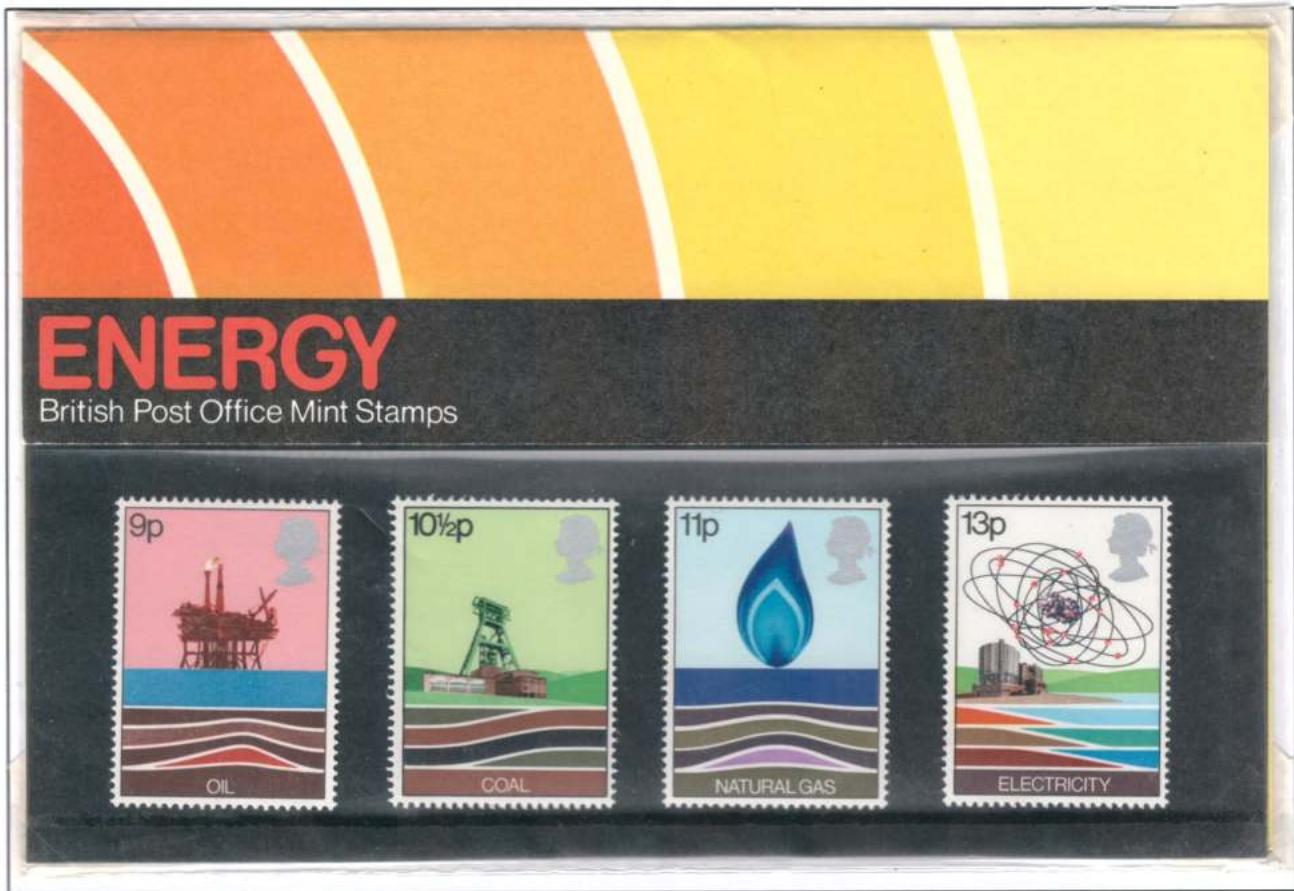
The **Thistle Field**, is a large oil field, still in production, in the north of the UKCS. The block was awarded in the fourth licensing round in 1972, and the first well was drilled and completed in July 1973, when the field was confirmed as a commercial discovery. The Thistle Alpha platform was installed at a water depth of 161.5m, in 1976. Production commenced in early 1978 with oil export initially by tanker. Once the export pipeline had been installed, later in 1978, oil was sent through the Brent Pipeline system to Sullom Voe Oil Terminal.

This envelope, with Aberdeen postmark, commemorates the first Thistle tanker sailing on 14 April 1978.



UKCS Oil and Gas

The UK has issued few related stamps, but the 9p and 11p values of the Energy issue of 25 January 1978, highlighted the rapid expansion of the offshore oil and gas industries in the late 1970's. The text of the presentation pack stated that Britain would be self-sufficient in energy supply by 1980, but added that if the most optimistic predictions were fulfilled, then by 2000 the North Sea oil and gas would be insufficient to meet our needs.



The Industry Year stamps issued 14 January 1986 highlighted 4 areas where the UK benefits from different industries. By including a light bulb over an image of a North Sea oil drilling rig, the 17p value illustrated the need for energy. The presentation pack issued stated that the oil industry was one of the UK's biggest export earners, the profits from which helped to pay for healthcare and education.



The British Engineering Achievements stamps issued 25 May 1983 included a 28p value showing the Iolair semi-submersible offshore platform, built by Scott Lithgow in Port Glasgow, and launched in 1981. This was an emergency support vessel commissioned by BP, to service their Northern North Sea fields. It included the most powerful fire fighting engine in the world.



UKCS Oil and Gas

The **Iolair** was delivered to BP in August 1982 and was designed to operate in winds of up to 70 knots and waves of 15 metres, typical of the difficult conditions of the North Sea. The total 20,000 horse-power gave the vessel a speed of 13 knots, and could be used to hold the vessel on station in severe weather conditions. The fire pumps (now removed) could deliver 10,200 tonnes of water per hour with a range of 200 metres. BP sold the Iolair in 1995; she is currently owned by Exeter Marine and is working as a construction and platform support vessel in the Gulf of Mexico.

This British Engineering Achievements FDC was flown by helicopter to Iolair, as stated on the seal flap, shown below.



Flown by helicopter to IOLAIR,
Britain's First Emergency
Support Vessel

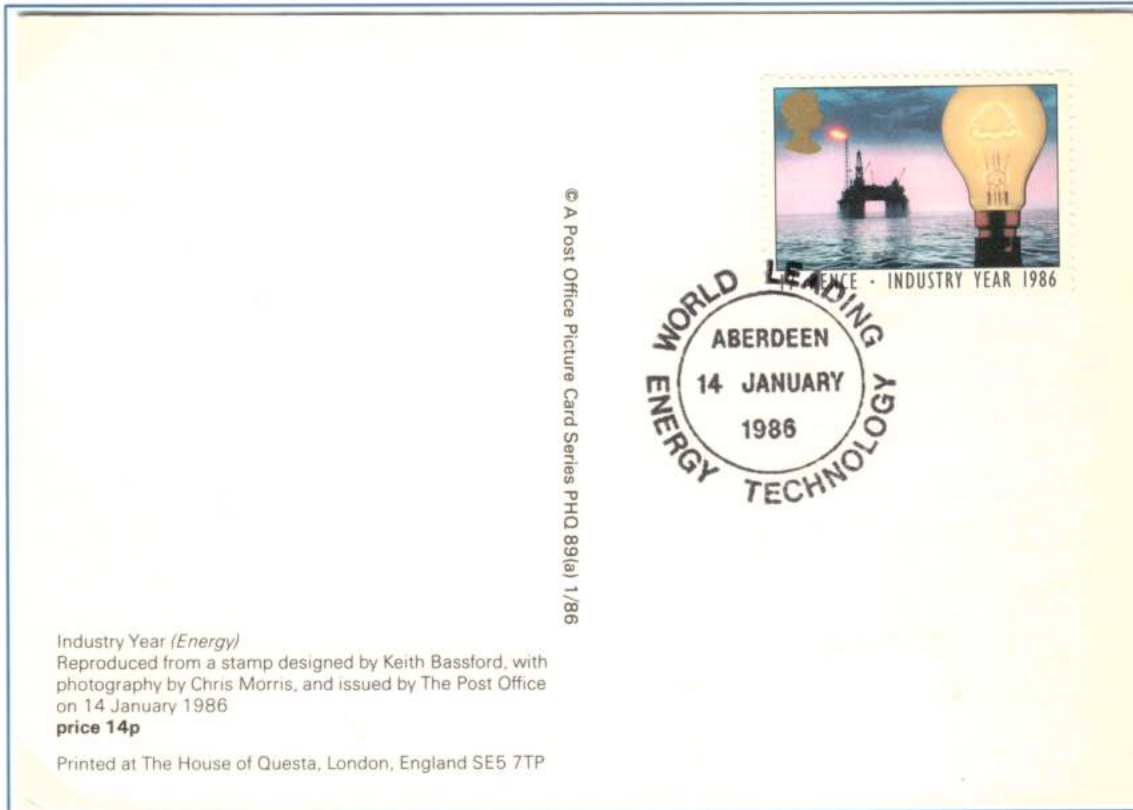


Benham (A. Buckingham Ltd.) 22/28 High Street, Hythe, Kent

BP IOLAIR
Britain's First Emergency
Support Vessel

UKCS Oil and Gas

Early on in development of the oil industry, and in competition with Dundee, Aberdeen agreed to provide harbour facilities for the industry, and a new era of prosperity for the city followed. The city adopted the title of Europe's Oil Capital, although that title is now claimed by Stavanger.

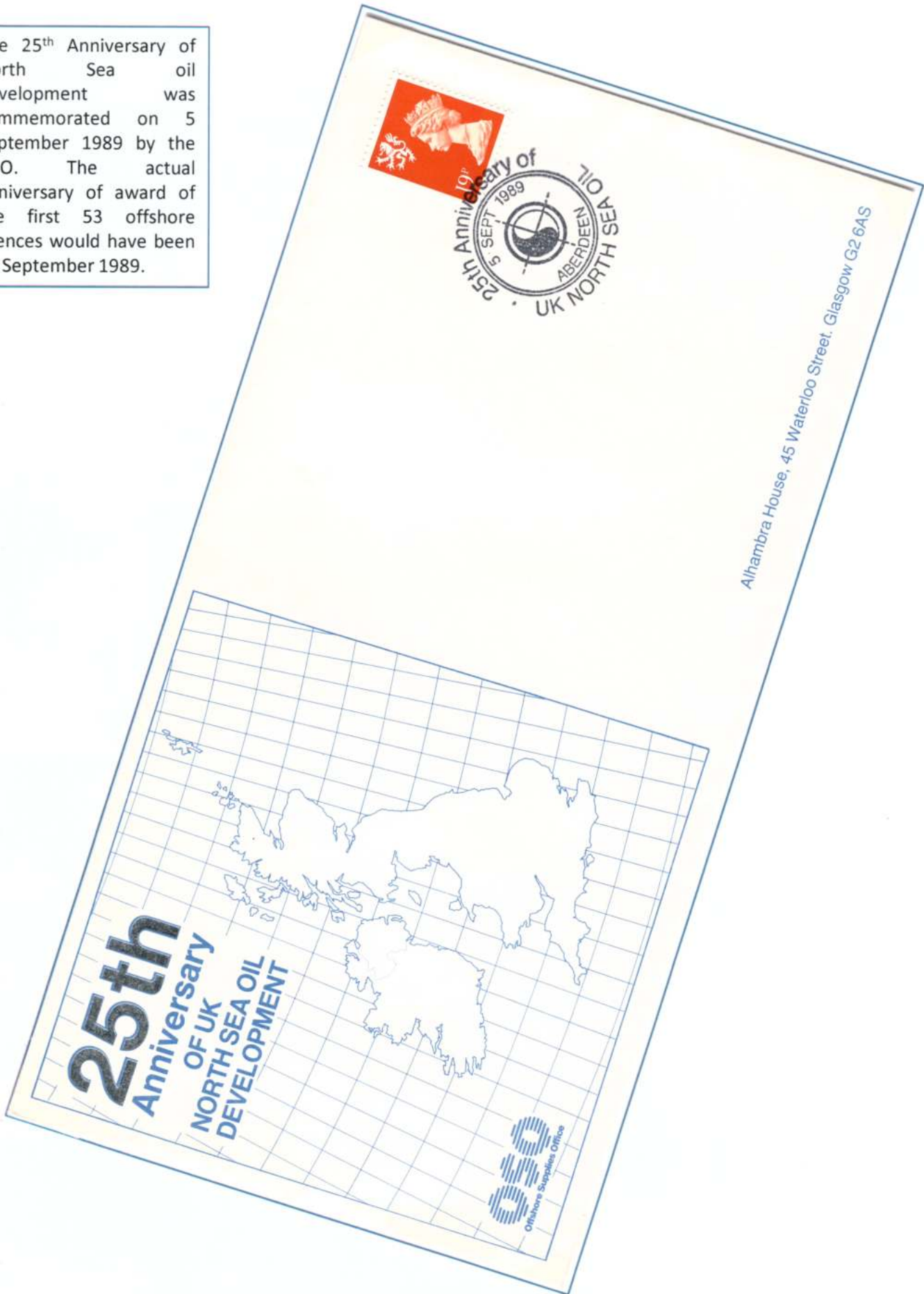


Aberdeen used a special postmark when the Industry Year stamps were released in 1986

UKCS Oil and Gas

The **Offshore Supplies Office (OSO)** was a government agency based in Glasgow, originally part of the Department of Trade and Industry, set up to increase the British industrial participation in North Sea expenditure from an assumed 30%, to a target 70%. The target was quickly exceeded, although pressure from the European Commission impacted negatively on OSO operations. OSO was part of the Department of Energy from 1974.

The 25th Anniversary of North Sea oil development was commemorated on 5 September 1989 by the OSO. The actual anniversary of award of the first 53 offshore licences would have been 18 September 1989.



UKCS Oil and Gas

The 50th Anniversary of the first gas production from the UKCS was on 6 March 2017. There was however, no postal commemoration of this achievement. The closest recent reference to the UK offshore energy industry appears to be the production platform shown on the 90p value of the Jersey issue for the 75th Anniversary of the RAF, issued on 6th February 2016.



UKCS oil and gas production peaked in 1999 and has since fallen significantly. The North Sea is a mature province in slow decline. But thanks to ever more sophisticated technology and new discoveries being made, important amounts of oil and gas could still be produced for up to 50 years.

The graph data is from the BP Statistical Review of World Energy, 2017.

