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Petroleum Geology of the Irish Sea and Adjacent Areas

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Preface

Historically the sedimentary basins to the west of mainland Britain have taken a backseat role in the exploration of the UK Continental Shelf. Throughout the 1980s the discovery and development of fields in the prolific basins of the North Sea retained both the technical focus and, more importantly, the budget funds of major operators. Consequently, the history of exploration in western areas, and particularly in the East Irish Sea Basin, is one of alternating feasts and famines (Colter, this volume). In this context the recent years of 1990–1995 represent a major feast, the second such feast in the exploration history of the region. More importantly, a veritable feast both in the volume of hydrocarbons discovered and the apparent advancement of geological understanding.

The initial leap forward, made during the mid 1970s in the East Irish Sea Basin, is, however, likely to remain the volumetrically most important. Current workers in these basins owe a great debt to the ‘early pioneers’ who carried out the initial exploration and simultaneously had to break the mould of traditional North Sea thinking.

Ultimately it was the discovery of the giant Morecambe Field in 1974 which proved the value of exploration in the west but the full potential of the area has, we believe, yet to be realized. Witness the efforts of the early 1990s which overturned the ‘one field gas basin’ paradigm and transformed the East Irish Sea Basin into a mature oil and gas province. This gave impetus to exploration, drew attention to the geological complexity and, in so doing, added more than a dozen fields to the maps of the area, including the oil fields of Douglas and Lennox.

This volume is not intended to comprise the definitive statement on the petroleum geology of the East Irish Sea and adjacent areas, but rather to provide a snap-shot of current understanding which will hopefully prove a platform for further exploration in basins west of Britain. We hope that our joint efforts will encourage the continuing exploration of the region, particularly in the lesser explored basins. We wish success to those with the belief, imagination and funds to give the west a try.

In producing this volume we are indebted to a number of individuals and organizations: the authors and referees who have given freely of their time and expertise, the companies and universities who have permitted publication and also our employers for giving us the time to devote to the task. Mention must also be made of the Geological Society staff and officers who have guided us through the organization of both the conference from which the volume stemmed and the volume itself.

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