

Crossings

by Noel Connor



Every crossing is its own short story
be it yours or mine or that stranger
travelling with you to the other shore
sitting quietly lost in thought
or perhaps outside leaning on the rails.

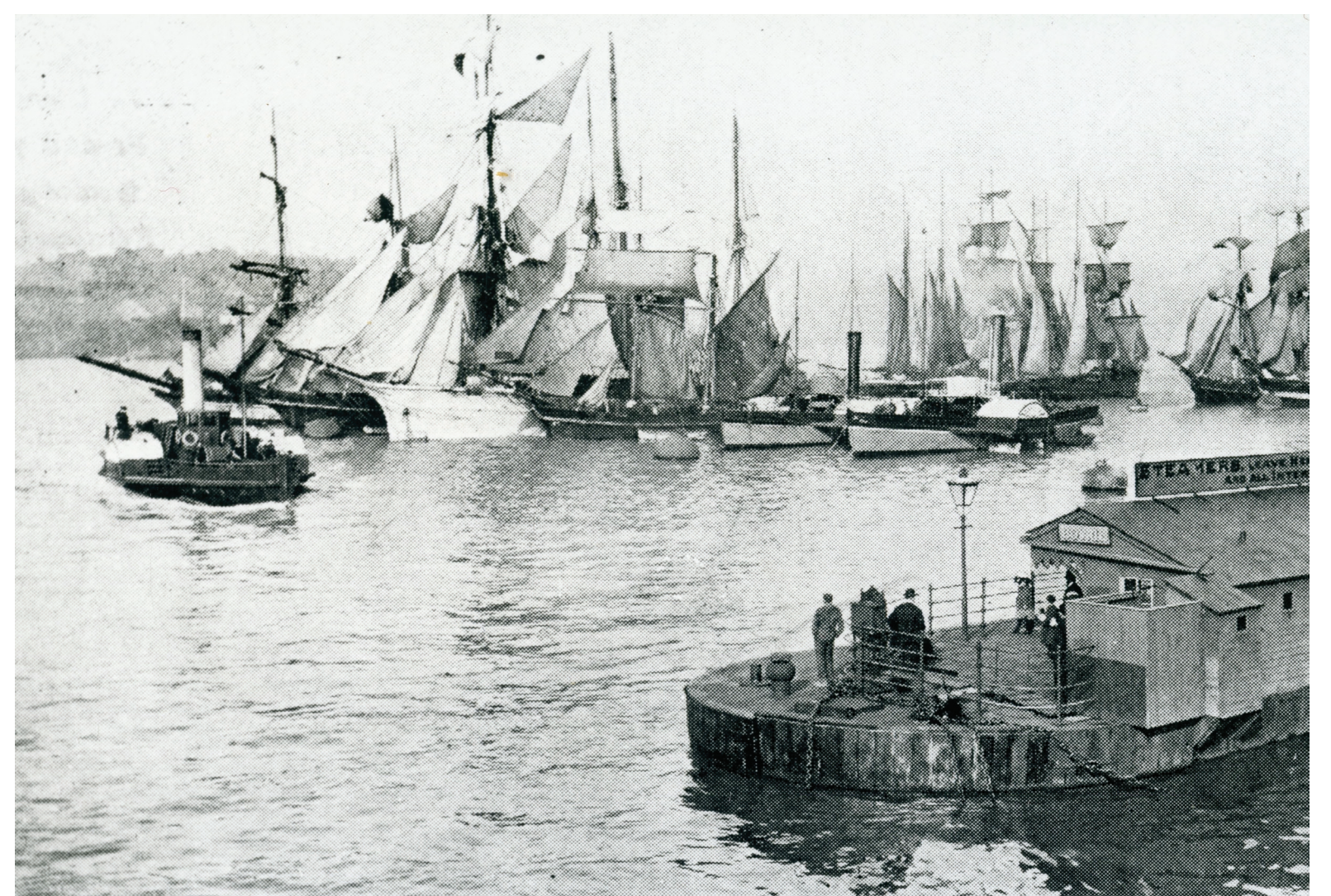
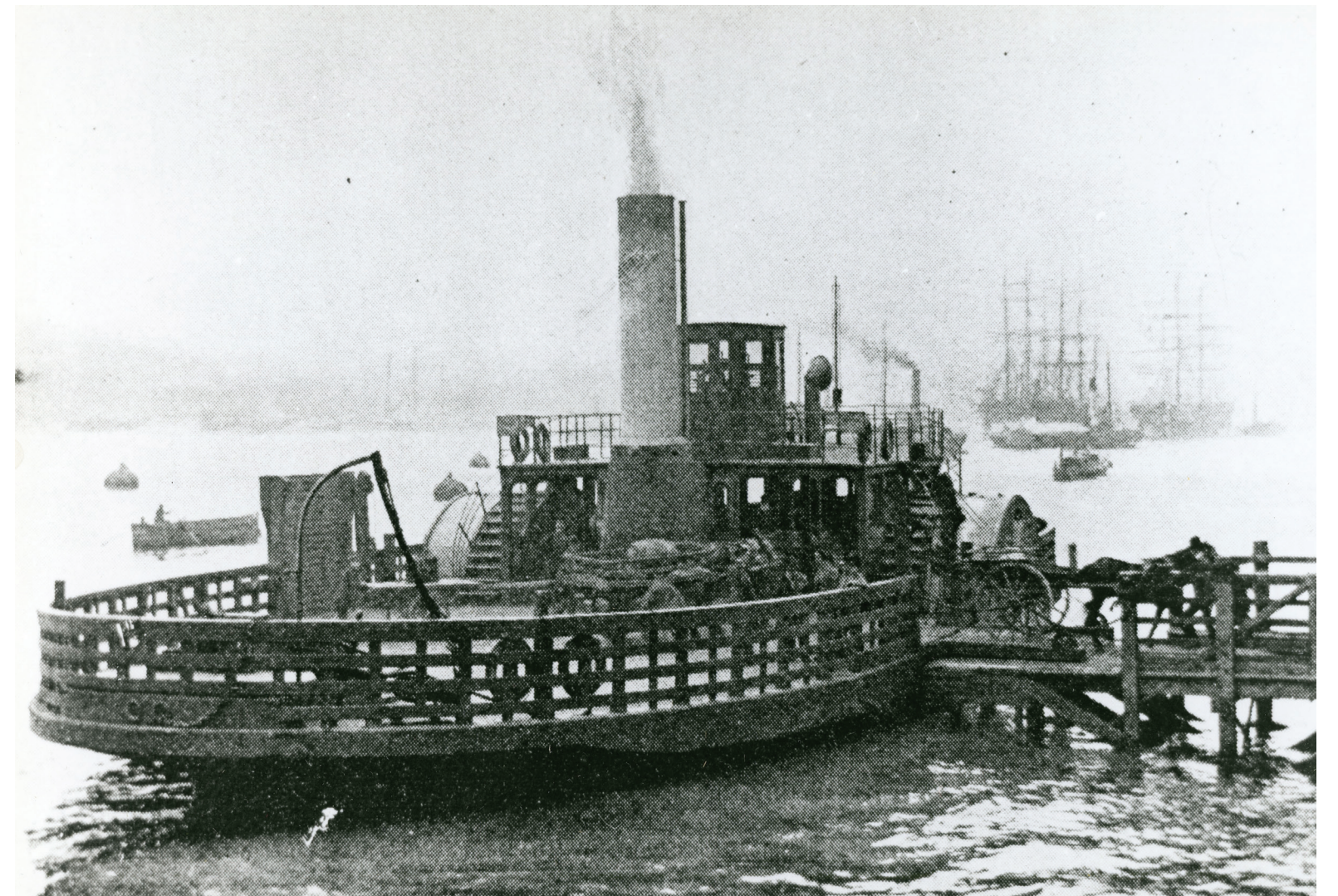
A multitude of untold tales
carried for centuries across this river,
the everyday comings and goings
the whys and the wherefores,
week after week, year after year,
the unspoken hopes and fears
between leaving and arriving,
each journey from here to there,
from place to place, from door to door
to reach our private destinations.

Some sit content in silent contemplation
others in the company of friends
full of boisterous banter,
family groups of the young and old
settle in talkative corners
or huddle and whisper on the upper deck.
Generations of wind blown conversations,
a swirling wake of words
stretched behind us on this river

May I join you on this journey,
take a little of your time
to tell a short and distant tale.
Let's imagine for just a moment
that you and I can see them still,
the young couple standing on the quayside
waiting for the 'Ha'penny Dodger'
to ferry them across the bustling Tyne.
Overdressed for a workday
looking awkward in their Sunday best,
losing a days pay at the Chemical Works
to make that tuppenny trip to be married
at St Cuthbert's on the Northern shore.

Does this river remember them?
for I have only their names,
they could afford no formal photographs
they left no tender letters
for me to find and carefully unfold.
Two of history's forgotten people
lost stories, untold loves and lives.

The wordless ones
who couldn't read or write
who made their simple mark
between the covers of that heavy register
now shelved within sight of this quayside,
forever stored behind the formal walls
of the old North Tyneside Records Office,
two crossings penned in nervous ink,
pressed together in a closed book.



Crossings for National Poetry Day

On Tuesday 10 October 1848, Ellen Hannah and Thomas Connor took this short journey across the River Tyne. They travelled from South Shields, where their families had settled after arriving from Ireland, to marry at St Cuthbert's in North Shields, which was then the only Catholic church in the area.

Neither could read or write, and they could only make crosses beside their names in the official marriage register.

Their great grandson, Noel Connor, an artist and writer, has written a poem about them, titled Crossings.

The poem commemorates them and their short journey across the river that day, as well as all the other people who history has little record of.



Scan here to view a short film and listen to the poem.

Noel Connor acknowledges the help and support given by Nexus in the delivery of this project and thanks South Tyneside Libraries for the use of photographs from their archives.

