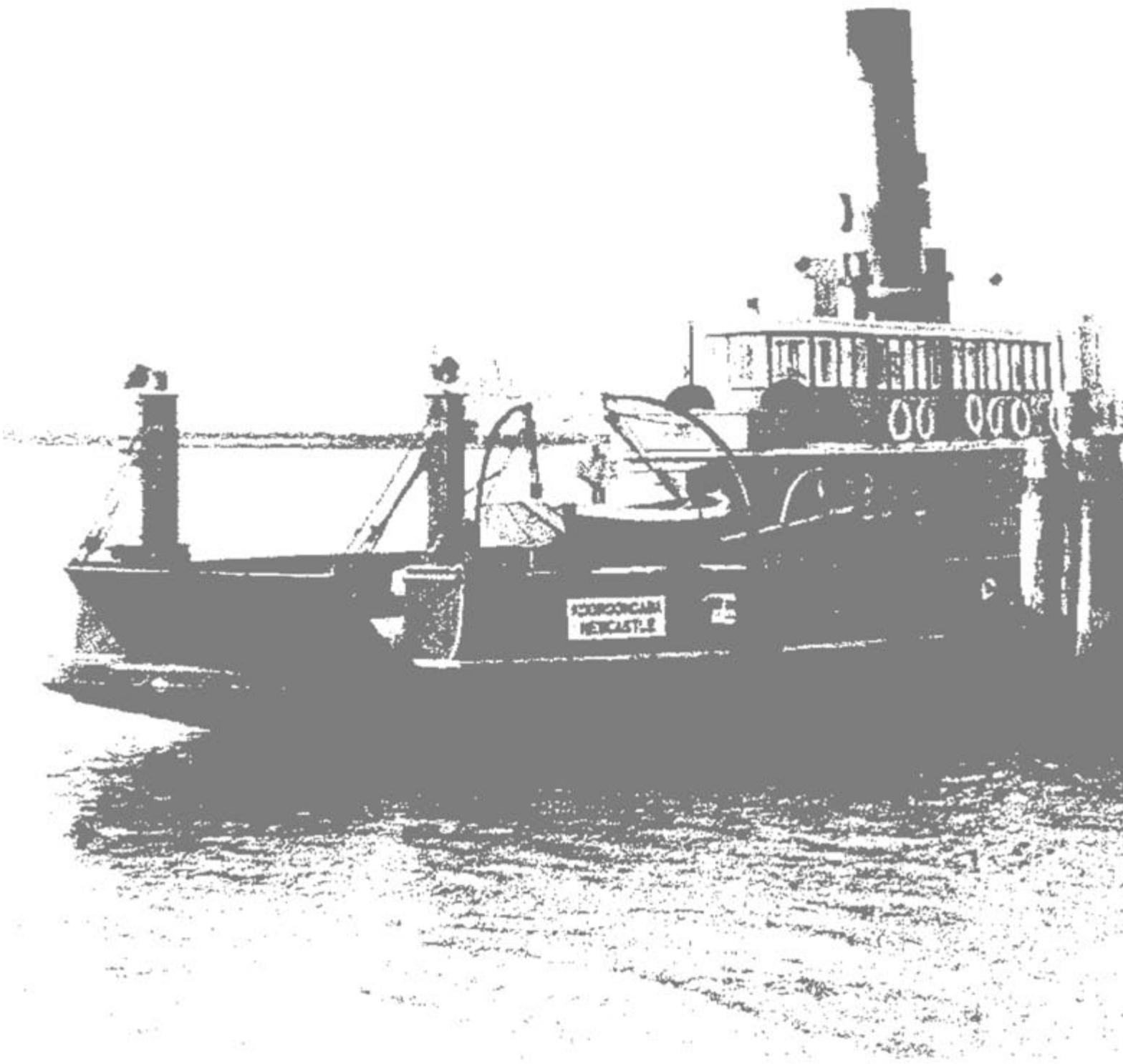


THE CAR PUNTS OF NEWCASTLE



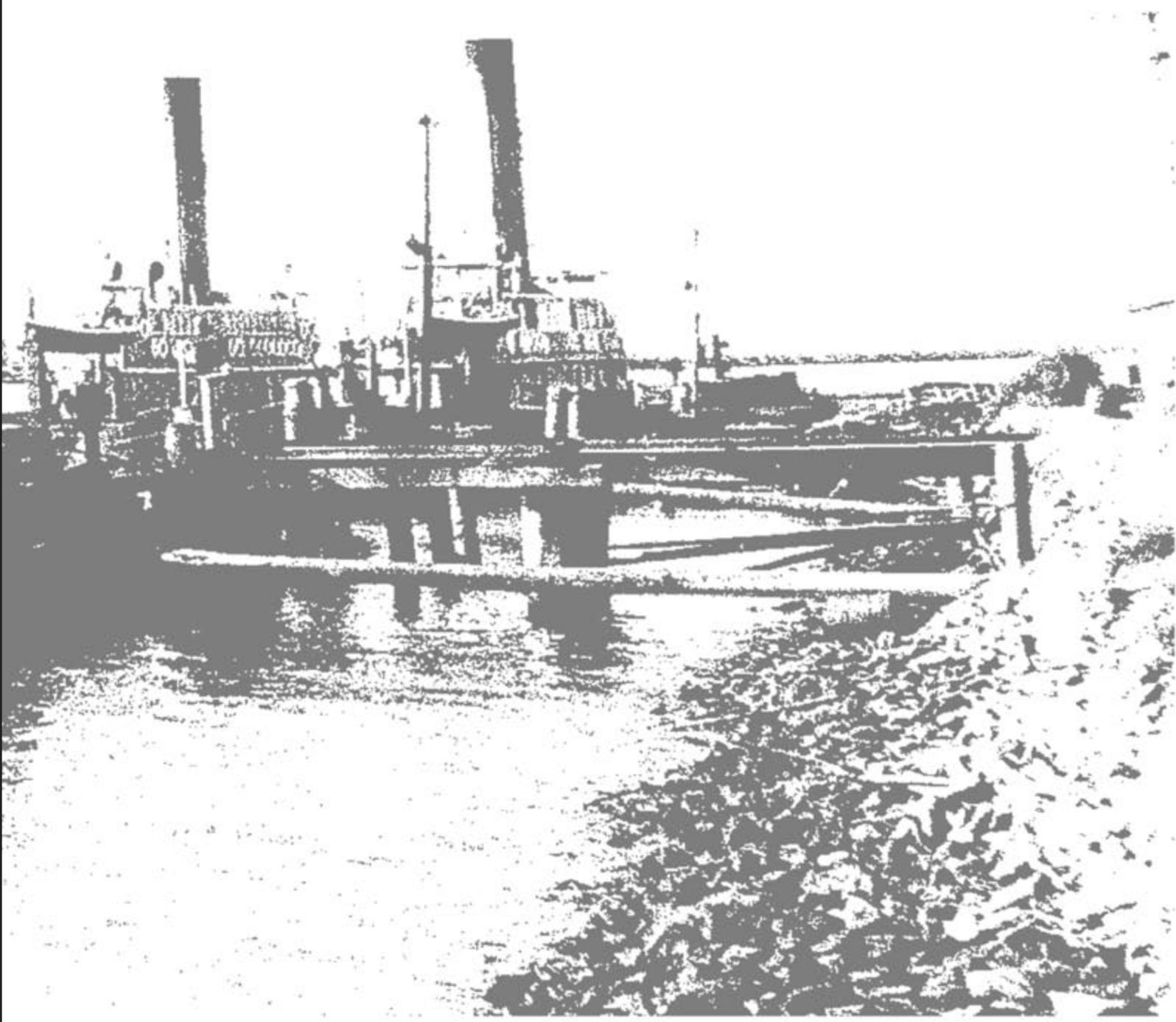
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Officialdom refers to them as “vehicular ferries”. A less polysyllabic and officious title for them is “car ferries”, but to the people of Newcastle and Stockton they were universally known as “the punts”. They were called punts in order to distinguish them from the passenger ferries which also plied the harbour. Passenger ferries and punts left from different wharves which were some distance apart, so it was important to be sure which you were talking about – especially if you were arranging to meet someone. Whether they get called car ferries or punts elsewhere seems to be somewhat arbitrary. The vehicular ferry that crosses the Parramatta River from Mortlake to Putney has always been known as “the Mortlake punt”, whereas the ferries across the Hawkesbury at Wisemans Ferry are referred to as simply “ferries” - perhaps because of the occurrence of the word in the place name. But in Newcastle, if you don’t call them “punts” - you’ll probably be corrected.



THE CAR PUNTS OF NEWCASTLE

BILL BOTTOMLEY



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However, it's not easy to keep track of all the people that I have received help from in preparing this publication. Anyone whose assistance is not mentioned in what follows should feel miffed at the oversight, and let me know so that I can correct the omission.

Acknowledging the provenance of images that I've chosen to include on this site has likewise not always been easy. Many of the photographs have been published and re-published in various places, such that the person or organisation responsible for the original shot is often difficult to trace. Where no attribution has been made, it is because the source is not reliably known. Should any of the attributions I have made prove to be erroneous, or if copyright has unwittingly been infringed, advice to that effect from the copyright owner will result in amended attribution or withdrawal of the offending image. It should also be stressed that this electronic publication is solely for research and study only, and that its author receives no pecuniary gain from its publication. I just hope it serves some sort of useful purpose.

How this book came about

In 1998 my partner Lorraine Banks introduced me to a tape recording that was held in the archives of the Dharug and Lower Hawkesbury Historical Society, (she was its first President). It was an account of when four vehicular ferries were swept down the Hawkesbury in the floods of Easter 1978. This led to my writing a small book about the event, *When the Ferries Got Away*. Lorraine is also something of a car ferry buff - has been for years - and in our travels around Australia together I found that we had to deviate from our planned route whenever there was a car ferry within cooee, so that she could add it to her list of the ones she had travelled on. (She's been on all of the NSW ones still running and many that are no longer in service, and many interstate ones as well). As a schoolgirl she was a regular user of the Stockton/Newcastle punts when she was going to Newcastle Girls' High from Williamtown. When she told me about their sad end on the beach at Trial Bay in 1972 I was immediately interested.

It had been the best part of a decade since writing up the story of the fugitive ferries at Wisemans and I was casting around for something to do to keep me out of mischief in my retirement. Having done one book about vehicular ferries, it seemed appropriate that I do another one, and I considered writing up the drama of the beaching of the Newcastle punts on their way to the Philippines soon after they were taken out of service. But when I began to research the matter, I was soon impressed by the large contribution the steam-powered old girls had made to the history of Newcastle Harbour. They were an institution - had achieved almost iconic status in the harbour environment - so I decided to broaden the scope of things and talk about not just the dramatic end to the career of the last three punts, but to have a general look at the era of steam-driven punts on Newcastle harbour.

Once you go looking for it you soon find that there is a lot of material available about the punts - some of it incredibly detailed. Trouble is, it's all a bit fragmented, and now that the punts are no longer around, it seemed to me that it might be worthwhile for me to try to do a bit of integrating of the bits and pieces. And that's pretty much all this book is - a stringing-together of historical cullings in a hopefully easily-digestible way, including as much pictorial material as I could glean that I thought was relevant. The steadfast old girls worked hard all their lives, carrying cars and people and cargo, and the part they played in the development of the port of Newcastle shouldn't be allowed to disappear into the mists of the past.

The size of the potential readership for a book like this wouldn't be large enough to make publishing it in hard copy form a viable enterprise, so I have published it electronically instead. This means that it is relatively easy to make amendments, and readers who come across stuff that is incorrect are encouraged to contact me and tell me about anything that needs to be added or corrected. Just click on the "Contact Bill" link on the home page of this website.

Bill Bottomley, April 2008.