

# Nautical Archaeology



The Newsletter of Nautical Archaeology Society - Summer 2016



## The John Starkie NAS Ethnographic award

By José Manuel

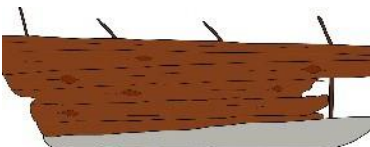
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## Missing Aircraft of Scapa Flow, Orkney

By Sandra Henry

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## A Lost Keel in the River Meuse at Cuijk

By Peter Seinen

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## A lost keel in the river Meuse at Cuijk, Netherlands



Peter Seinen



Joost van den Besselaar

Peter Seinen and Joost van den Besselaar are members of the board of the Mergor Foundation in Mosam. They are involved in all kinds of underwater archaeological and paleontological projects. Mergor in Mosam has a website: [www.mergorinmosam.nl](http://www.mergorinmosam.nl)

In the course of the excavation of a Roman bridge in the river Meuse at Cuijk in 1994 [1], a large board composed of thick oak planks was discovered under water between two large stone blocks that were a part of the most western column of the bridge.

The first attempts to recover the board, by means of a large lift-bag, showed that it was not an ordinary wooden object. It took a crane to move it to the shore, where it became obvious why the first attempts failed: the board was attached to a massive slab of lead, weighing about 180 kg and measuring 145 cm in length. Further research into the use of the object revealed that it was a ship's keel with a lead counter-balance. This counter-balance was to prevent the ship from tipping over when under sail.

As the water level in the river Meuse was often very shallow in the past, the allowable depth of the keel was very small. In order to create as much leverage as needed for keeping the ship balanced, the keel was equipped with a large lead slab. The figure below shows an accurate drawing of the keel show-

ing the broad oak board, the grey lead slab and four steel pins to secure the keel to the ship.

It was not before 1930 that efforts were made to raise and stabilize the water level of the Meuse in order to make it more suitable for shipping. The ship that was equipped with this special keel must therefore date at latest to 1930. At that time it was widely known that the river bottom near Cuijk was littered with large stone blocks, so we do not know why the unfortunate captain got stuck. We do know that his manoeuvring eventually got his ship loose, but at the cost of his keel. As this event is unlikely to have passed unnoticed, we are searching in newspaper archives for names and dates.

[1] Goudswaard B., The Late Roman Bridge at Cuijk, Proceedings of the National Service for Archaeological Heritage in the Netherlands, ROB Volume 44, 2000.

