

The Eel Fishing Museum is part of

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Exhibition booklet

of the Eel fishing museum in the *Fiat Voluntas* Aalschokker

Do you
speak
english?



MONHEIM AM RHEIN

The deck

The deck and interior of an eel schokker are divided into three large areas. You have entered the schokker via the aft deck (Dutch aft = back). On the main deck, the blue deckhouse will take you to the living quarters below deck. Next to it, you will see two trapdoors leading to the holding chambers. The eel catch was kept alive below deck in these water basins. Before you enter the deckhouse, have a look at the foredeck: There you'll find three cable winches, which for a long time were operated with only physical strength. They steer an ingenious system of wire ropes for moving the eel schokker between its idle position near the riverbank and the fishing position in the middle of the river. The fishing apparatus is also "lowered" into the water with the wire cables. The two fishing trees – today without a net - hang to the side along the wall of the ship.

The Parlour

For the fishermen, this small parlour was the most important gathering place during the evening hours. They spent their time here when the schokker was "lowered" into the fishing position in the early evening and went to bed early. The large window gives you the same overview of the main deck towards the fishing apparatus the fisherman once had. The parlour was particularly popular because of the warm oven whose cooktop was sometimes used to prepare the odd evening meal. However, you won't be able to find a bathroom on this eel schokker: Anyone wanting to wash themselves or do their business did so mostly with cold water from the Rhine and a bucket. The fishermen kept their work material and private possessions in the cabinets and benches that are locked today. Only in the parlour can you sneak a peak in the open cabinet...

The speaking pot

"Ah, finally back in a dry place. Getting the eel schokker out into the fishing position in this weather is anything but child's play. But now the nets are in the water! Come my boy, let's warm up with a nice bowl of soup! Can you fire up the oven?"

"Will do. Dad, do you think lots of eels will get caught in the net tonight while we're asleep?"

"For sure! If it rains and a lot of water runs into the Rhine, many of the eels will swim downstream. Then tomorrow morning, your mother will sell the catch on the market. If we're lucky, she'll make us her delicious eel soup again! The recipe is ready for you to take home. Did you find it?"

Recipe: Eel Soup

Eel soup was once a popular way to prepare freshly caught eel. It is often considered a hearty meal of leftovers; nonetheless the many ingredients make it a special delight.

This recipe is but one of many ways to make eel soup. Ask your fish dealer to skin, filet and cut it into pieces.

Time required:
about 1 hour
Recipe for 4 persons

Ingredients:

- 500 g mixed dried fruit
- 1 l white wine
- 1.5 l flavourful meat broth
- 2 carrots
- 1 large parsley root
- 1/2 celery root
- 1 leek
- 2 TBSP vinegar
- some sugar
- salt, freshly ground
- pepper
- 800 g eel (skinned, filleted and cut into pieces)
- 2 TBSP finely chopped chives

Directions:

- 1. Boil the dried fruit in the wine until soft. It should not fall apart.**
- 2. Peel the carrots, parsley root and celery and cut into thin strips. Remove the roots and the green end of the leek, wash and cut into thin strips.**
- 3. Heat up the meat broth and cook the vegetables in it until they are al dente.**
- 4. Add the pieces of eel and let cook.**
- 5. Add the dried fruit along with the cooking liquid and season the soup to taste.**
- 6. Serve sprinkled with chives.**

Based on the "Monheim eel soup" recipe: Äppelschlot un Prummetaat – Dat Monnemer Kochbuch, mayor Thomas Dünchheim (publisher), Monheim am Rhein, Marke Monheim e.V., 2011, p. 22

The cabin with bunks

The cabin with the two bunks served as the living room and bedroom. Some families of fishermen even lived on their eel schokker all year round and had no home on land. This schokker was last deployed as a work ship. Sleeping quarters were nonetheless essential: While fishing at night, the eel schokker had to be manned by two persons. The cabin was often used this way and comfortably furnished with a table, petroleum lamps and wall decorations. A second oven provided protection against the cold that could also be severe at times during the fishing season from May to November. The two niches served as bunks. It was not uncommon for children to sleep on the wooden benches if the bunks were already occupied by parents and siblings or work material. See for yourself how comfortable the bench is...

The “pirate ship”

Maybe you already know that the *Fiat Voluntas* is a “local celebrity”: In 1984, it appeared as a pirate ship on the cover of the album “Unter falscher Flagge” (Under False Colours) of the Düsseldorf punk rock band “Die Toten Hosen”.

The former owner Wilhelm Wirtz recalls: “When I was asked for permission to perform a photo shoot on the *Fiat Voluntas*, I didn’t know which band it was for. On the day of the photo shoot, I dropped by and saw the men posing in pirate costumes. When I recognised the resulting photo on the album of the “Tote Hosen”, I was surprised, but also a bit proud!”

The album was the first release of the "Toten Hosen" under their new record label. The old record label found the cover provocative and had it censored shortly after its release due to the vilification of the company logo on the black pirate flag. The meaning of the Latin name *Fiat Voluntas*, "thy will be done", was also seen as an affront. The album with the original cover image from 1984 was re-released on the 25th anniversary of the band in 2007.

Faith

The image of the Virgin Mary and the crucifix are two of the most important devotional images of the Catholics. They embodied the faith of many in the Rhineland, which is shaped by Catholicism. The byname "Stella Maris" (lat. Star of the Sea) refers to the Virgin Mary as a patron saint of seafarers and fishermen. She symbolises the guiding star that shows her devotees the way on the sea and in life.

Origin

Wooden shoes are a well known symbol from the Netherlands where they are called "Klompen". The colourful pair of wooden shoes found as a decoration on board the *Fiat Voluntas* denotes the Dutch origin of the eel schokker: This type of ship was specially developed for eel fishing on the island of Schokland. From there, it spread to Germany. In 1937, the *Fiat Voluntas* was built in the former fishing village of Schiedam near Rotterdam in the Netherlands before making its way to the Lower Rhine.



Log book

Did you spot the log book on the table? Have a look inside!



Eel fishing with an eel schokker

“Grandpa, look what I found!”

“Oh, my old log book! You know, I was as old as you are now when I started helping my father fish – he wrote down and explained everything for me in this book. During the day, the eel schokker was at anchor near the shore, between two wave breakers -- which were called “Kribbenköpfe” (crib heads). They protected it from the current and ship traffic. When evening came, it was time to get to work. To get on board, we had to cross over in a small boat.”

“The second picture looks a bit complicated!”

“Yes. You know, eel schokkers didn’t have an engine or sails. They were connected to the shore with wire cables, those are the lines there. Letting the wire cables out allowed the eel schokker to drift downstream into the middle of the river and winding them up pulled it upstream towards the shore.”

“Phew, that sounds like hard work!”

“Yes, that was very hard work! And the heavy catch trees were moved with the cable winch and lowered into the water. So all the boys in the family had to help out since this was almost impossible on your own...!”

Hmm... yes, in the next pictures, you can see how we lower the net into the water. The end of the fishing net was attached to the fyke. From the dinghy, we threw the fyke into the water at the end of the net."

"The net is really long!"

„That’s right, about 30 metres long... to make sure the other ships could see us in the dark, we hung up oil lamps overnight – there was no electricity on the schokker. Then it was ‘supertime and off to the bunk!’"

***That’s what you always say to me!?
‘Off to your bunk you go!’***

"Yes, that’s where it comes from! But actually, I slept on the wooden bench most of the time since there was no room for me in the bunk. At the crack of dawn, we collected the catch with the dinghy. Of course, there weren’t just eels in the net, there were also a lot of other fish. Whatever we couldn’t eat or sell was thrown back overboard. To the seagulls’ delight!"

"That’s right, grandma always tells me how she helped you afterwards and sold the fish on the markets in the morning. She had to walk many kilometres carrying the heavy baskets to get there!"

"That’s right. The men had to remove small branches, floating debris and garbage from the nets in the meantime. Unfortunately, a lot of people threw their garbage into the Rhine... oh well, and then the kids went off to school!"

“Really, school after all such hard work...!?”

Yes, it sure was hard. But sometimes I would sneak out on deck at night, lie under the starry sky and listen to the rushing waters of the Rhine. For me, that made the hard work worthwhile. I wouldn't have traded it for anything, my little crab head.



Everyday life on board

“Grandpa, what’s in these pictures?”

“Let’s have a look. Ah, now I remember... That was our pride and joy – our four eel schokkers! They spent the winter at anchor in the port. The two schokkers Helena 1 and 2 are named after your grandma. Helena 1 was the ship we lived on. We lived there all year round. Imagine that, we didn’t have a house on land at all!”

“Wow...”

“The second picture is of the Fiat Voluntas when it was in the water during fishing season.”

“Oh, it looks so small!”

“But our Fiat Voluntas isn’t that small at all. It is a whole 16 metres long and almost five metres wide. Here, I’m cranking the cable winch to lower the heavy catch trees into the water. Being a fisherman was hard work! Only later did we install a motor to help make cranking easier.”

“So that’s what the cabin looked like back then?”

“That’s right, we made it nice and cosy - after all, we spent a lot of time on the ship. Here, I’m putting on my rubber boots for work. In the evenings, we’d head out to lower the nets into the water.”

“What is the long thing hanging from the ceiling?”

“That’s the fyke, which was hung on the mast to dry during the day. The fyke was the end of the fishing net where the catch would be squirming about later on. In the last pictures, you can see how we pull in the catch and it is laid out on board. By then, there were only a few fish in the catch...”

“But in the last picture you still look proud to hold the fish you caught up for the camera!”

“That’s right. That’s me in the front holding a couple of eels. And my father with the captain’s hat is showing off a bream I think. I bet you taste good too...”

“Grandpa!!!”



The end of eel fishing on the Rhine

"Oh dear, those are the old newspaper clippings I collected when eel fishing on the Rhine was coming to an end. More and more large freighters were frequenting the Rhine day and night while factories were sprouting up along the river and its tributaries. They channelled their dirty and even toxic waste water directly into the Rhine. It kept getting more polluted and started to stink! It wasn't long until we didn't want to swim in it anymore. The polluted water and the large ships ended up destroying the natural habitat of many plants and animals. By the mid-60s, there were hardly any fish left in the Rhine as many species of fish had died out. Some even considered the Rhine "dead!"

***"A dead river with no fish?
Is that why you stopped fishing?"***

"Exactly, I was the last master fisherman on the Rhine! Imagine that, an entire way of life vanished almost overnight!"

“That’s awful! But the Rhine is healthy again now, isn’t it?”

“Thank goodness people realised how important the environment is. That’s why, since the 70s, there are stricter rules and steps have been taken to protect our waterways. There were also terrible environmental disasters, have a look at the articles: Two times, a toxic wave swept down almost the entire Rhine to the sea. It was horrible, scores of fish died and were washed ashore. In this picture, you can see all the poisoned fish that drifted into the net in just one night.

But you’re right. Since then, the Rhine has made an almost full recovery; the water quality is good again and there are plenty of fish in its waters. Nowadays, you even see hobby fisherman back on its banks - but the days of professional fishing are over.”

“But now it has its very own eel fishing museum!”

„That’s right. And that makes me very proud...”



Credits

Principal

Stadt Monheim am Rhein

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HHS Planer + Architekten AG

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Arthur Fischer Architekten

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