

Six awesome stories
in Leuven city

STORY HUNTERS



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Story Hunters is an audio walk for children and parents containing many amazing Leuven stories. Some actually happened while others have sprung from the imagination of the city's inhabitants. There are six places in the city centre where you can enjoy a fascinating story. Look for the story hunter board at each place and scan the QR code. Listen to the story and let yourself be carried away by the funny, spellbinding tales. They have been narrated by famous Leuven residents.

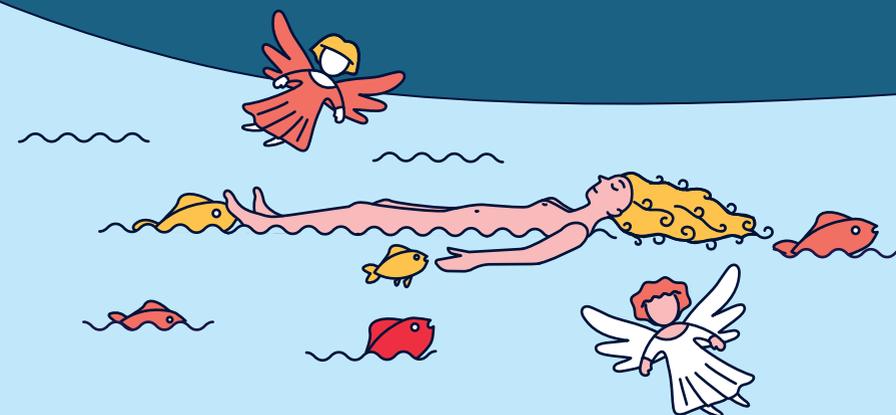
NOT TO WORRY! Although the best way to enjoy our captivating Leuven tales is to listen to them as an audio story, we won't leave you (or your family) out in the cold. In this brochure you will find a brief summary and explanation for the various amazing stories and their unique location in our city.

This walk does not have a start or end point. You can decide for yourself the route you take from story to story. There is no fixed order in which you should listen to the stories either. However, we have set out a pleasant, relaxing walking route for you on the map. We hope you enjoy listening to the stories and happy hunting!

BRAVE MARGRIET

In thirteenth-century Leuven, young Margriet helped out her Uncle Amandus and Aunt Rosafier in their inn. One evening, there were six travellers at the inn. When the wine ran out, Uncle Amandus sent Margriet to fetch some more. By the time Margriet had returned with a full pitcher of wine, the travellers had robbed the inn and murdered her aunt and uncle. As she was the only witness, the travellers kidnapped her. Margriet was hoisted on to a horse and the travellers galloped downstream out of the city. Once they had left the city behind, they murdered Margriet as well and threw her body into the River Dijle. The next morning, her body floated upstream along the Dijle into the city. Even Margriet's hair floated on the water against the current. The city guards who fished her body out of the Dijle talked of angels that floated above Margriet, while below the water large fish pulled her body upstream. To this very day, Margriet's remains are kept in a side chapel of Saint Peter's Church. She is the patron of martyrs and hospitality workers.

Take a moment to admire the statue of Margriet in her spot here beside the Dijle. Is the story true? Did her hair float against the current? Spend some time enjoying this beautiful location in the centre of our city.



THE MARSH MONSTERS

When Leuven was just a small settlement near the River Dijle, peasants set off to Leuven's wholesale market to sell their wares. They often had to make the journey on foot because of the surrounding marshes. Now and then one of them would disappear and the disappearance would be blamed on the marsh monsters.

As the years passed, the inhabitants forgot about the marsh monsters. However, the stories came back to light when Master De Layens ran into problems when building the Town Hall. The proud construction had almost been completed apart from a few sculptures in the niches of the building. The first five statues were real masterpieces but they went down with the ship carrying them to Leuven. The second set of statues was destroyed just before they could be installed. Coincidence, or was it down to the marsh monsters that refused to stand for the people of Leuven stealing more and more of their beloved marshes?

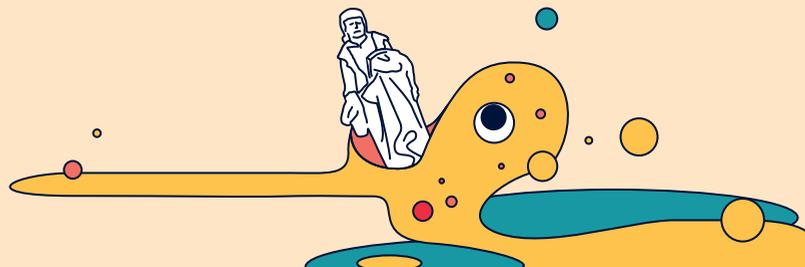
The Town Hall's empty niches would only be filled with their sculptures four hundred years later. And the monsters? Well, they retreated to the ponds of the nearby Provincial Domain of Kessel-Lo.

There is a lot to take in at the Grote Markt. Have you had a good look at the breath-taking Town Hall? Look up high, on top of the Church. You can see the "gold" statue of Master Jan; he strikes his bell every fifteen minutes. The Church too, has much to admire. It is home to the remains of our proud... er, brave Margriet.

THE FALSE KING OF HEVERLEE

A great many students attend lessons at College De Valk. Our story is also about students, but takes place in 1951. Belgium had just crowned a new, very young King Boudewijn. When two students bumped into a lookalike of the ruler in a pub, they hatched a plan to play an ambitious joke. They had wanted to visit Heilig Hart, a girls' school in Heverlee, for a long time. The two students dressed their ruler in a smart outfit and called the school one Tuesday morning, with the message that the King wanted to visit the college. A short while later, the group of twenty or so male students were standing in front of the school, each dressed in a suit and ready to play his part in the spectacle. Disguised as a journalist and the King's entourage, they allowed themselves, and their false king, to be taken on a tour of the school. The students almost succeeded in their plan, but were finally caught, arrested and even kicked out of the university. But the story doesn't end there. The students sold the images they made during their adventure to a television station. They donated the money they received for the images to a charity. This news reached the real King, after which he pardoned them and they were once again welcome at the university.

Fun fact: One of the students went on to become an influential politician. His name was Guy Spitaels.

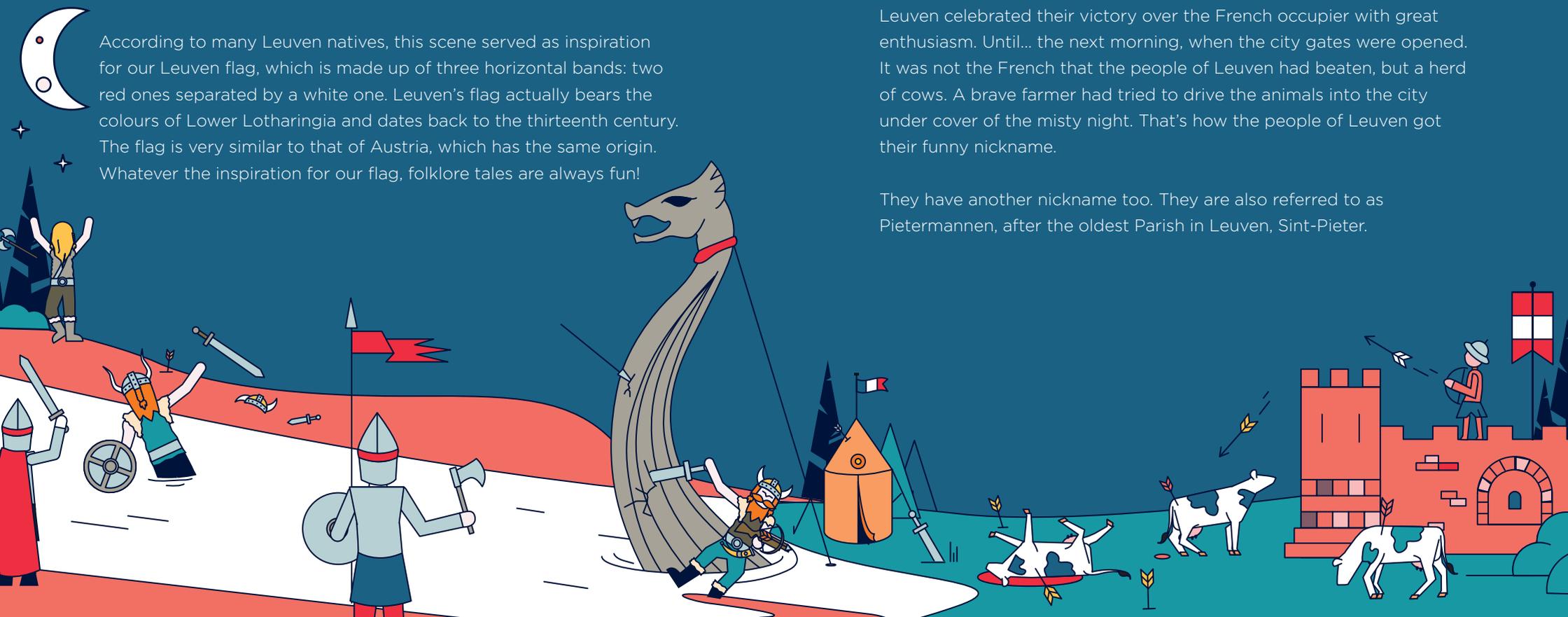


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THE BLOODY FLAG

In the year 880, the Vikings set up camp here by the River Dijle, near the settlement of Lovon. They set out from this location to raid the broken Kingdom of the Franks. In 891, King Arnulf of Carinthia decided to do something about it. He went to war against the Vikings and drove them back to the Dijle. The watercourse that had brought them to Leuven had now cut them off. The Vikings defended themselves bravely, but the muddy riverbanks made things difficult for them and they ultimately lost the battle. In the silence that followed the clang of arms, King Arnulf surveyed the battlefield. Both banks of the Dijle were stained red with the blood of the Vikings and the Dijle itself glistened silvery-white in the moonlight.

According to many Leuven natives, this scene served as inspiration for our Leuven flag, which is made up of three horizontal bands: two red ones separated by a white one. Leuven's flag actually bears the colours of Lower Lotharingia and dates back to the thirteenth century. The flag is very similar to that of Austria, which has the same origin. Whatever the inspiration for our flag, folklore tales are always fun!



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THE COW SHOOTERS

The people of Leuven are sometimes jokingly referred to as “cow shooters”. They bear this name with pride, although the origin of the story is rather ludicrous. In 1691, Leuven was besieged by the French troops of Louis XIV. After conquering Paris, they pitched their camps outside Leuven's city walls. No man or object could enter or leave the city. As provisions gradually ran out, the guards on the walls became more nervous by the day. When one of the guards thought he saw movement at the bottom of the wall one night, he raised the alarm. The Leuven archers rained down their fire ardently on the enemy. One arrow after another disappeared into the misty night, until everything fell silent once more. The enemy had been defeated. The people of Leuven celebrated their victory over the French occupier with great enthusiasm. Until... the next morning, when the city gates were opened. It was not the French that the people of Leuven had beaten, but a herd of cows. A brave farmer had tried to drive the animals into the city under cover of the misty night. That's how the people of Leuven got their funny nickname.

They have another nickname too. They are also referred to as Pietermannen, after the oldest Parish in Leuven, Sint-Pieter.

THE TREE OF GREAT SORROW

Atrecht College served as student accommodation for the very first female students at the University of Leuven in around 1920. The girls lived here under the strict supervision of the sisters of Maria Paridaens. They looked after the girls, but above all ensured that they did not get distracted by their fellow male students. Sister Berthe in particular is described in the annals as an extremely strict nun. She guarded over her girls like a lioness over her cubs. The girls had to be home by 7 p.m. every evening. Berthe waited for them on the little square near the rare Japanese pagoda tree. She chased away the young girls' admirers and interrupted the fervent embraces and goodbye hugs. According to the stories, this led to a great many tears of heartbreak. The tears flowed to the foot of the tree, and thanks to the salty moisture it grew taller and stronger than any other tree in the area. Hence the name "the tree of great sorrow".

A little further along, in Naamsestraat you will also find the "water pump of great sorrow". When it still worked, it apparently pumped out water with a slightly salty taste. Truth or myth? We will never know because the pump stopped working years ago.

AN INITIATIVE OF

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