

Most of Dutch Folk Tales are about water. Mermaids, crazy captains (remember The Flying Dutchman?), the lots. And much older than Victorian times. However, I do know the following story that is very steampunk to my ears:

The Iron Foal

The following folk tale is a tale that is set in the tiny town of Cabauw. It's really small, has one church, two taverns, some houses and many farms. There are three streets in this town, one heading north, just a narrow path over the pastures and fields to the neighbouring tiny town. The other streets are roads heading west and east, one south of the canal, one north. Bridges over the canal connect these two roads.

West of Cabauw is the town of Schoonhoven, and halfway these two settlements is the "House with the Lions". It is named after two statues that are the entrance to the garden. It is a large farmers house, rich in architecture, but it is looming under darkening oaks. Some say, the house is haunted. Some say, there is a secret chamber in this house. And some say, something is walled up in that secret chamber.

It used to be dark at night in Cabauw. The village did not have public lighting. The farmers returned from the fields at least at dusk, and did not get out of their warm rooms. However, some people needed to be out at night. Doctors visiting patients, the clergyman looking after the souls in need, people returning late from the market in Schoonhoven, some drunken persons coming from the taverns...

Now one of these persons, farmer Cats, returned to Cabauw, covered in sweat and shivering all over. He couldn't hold his drink when he told what had happened to him. "I was on my way from Schoonhoven back to Cabauw, then I heard a noise behind me. It was like some thing of metal rattling behind me. I looked around, and saw fierce red eyes. Then I ran, and ran..."

Just another drunk telling about his experiences after a few too much beers?

But then, a few days later, the clergyman, father Van Beek returned into the village with a similar story. "... I turned around and saw it, it looked like a foal, but made of iron. It had eyes that must come straight from hell. Red, flaming fire. And this noise... metal against metal... there was goose-skin all over me..."

When father Van Beek went to his church early the next day, he had to go the

same track. The night was gone, the sun shone, and in the broad daylight he saw tracks in the sand. Like a small horse had walked there, with his hooves on fire, burning traces in the cobblestones.

When doctor Driessen returned home from one of his patients, it was already deep into the night. There was no moon in the sky, dark clouds sailed over, and the man was glad he knew the roads here so well. A narrow road, water on both sides. The farms had their shutters closed against the cold eastern wind, and it was very dark.

Of course, the doctor had heard the stories about the iron foal that had been seen on these roads. He was a bit curious about it, but wondered if he should believe the stories. Foals were not made of iron, and what would a creature from hell doing in a village like Cabauw? So he thought, but then he heard that sound...

Iron on iron, metal on metal, screeching like an unoiled clockwork. He looked up. There was something coming towards him, the noise got louder and he was aware of two red lights that might have been eyes. There was nowhere to go, the beast in front of him, water on both sides... Doctor Driessen turned around and fled in the direction he had come from.

After this incident, the people of Cabauw gathered. They had to do something about this ghastly creature. They thought of something, and they made their preparations to catch the iron foal.

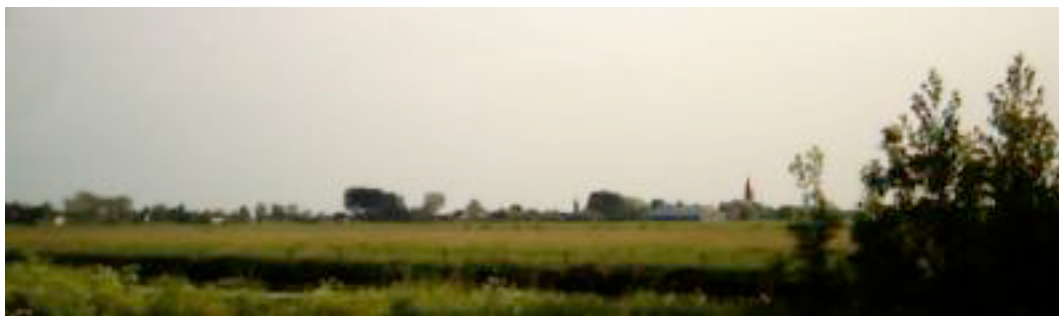
How they did it, it is not known. They managed to get the iron Foal into the House with the Lions. They lured the beast with the fierce eyes into a spare room of the damp cellar. There, it was walled up.

The memory of the events faded over the years, but people keep telling there is something “wrong” with the House with the Lions. They say they hear strange noises in there, like metal on metal, a rusty clockwork. But these noises come from behind the walls, and there are no doors to be found to what is supposed to be a secret chamber.

This is the story of the Iron Foal as far as I can remember it. The original story I read once, long ago, in a book and I heard it later from a friend who lives in Cabauw. The story is not online elsewhere and I can't check the details, so I made them up a bit. It's not a well-known legend, but it's probably one of the few real “steampunk” legends

from The Netherlands.

A picture of Cabauw:



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