

## **Sinead Oconnor**

# **"Irish ways and Irish Laws"**

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Once upon a time there were  
Irish Ways and Irish Laws  
Villages of Irish blood  
Waking to the morning  
Waking to the morning

Then the Vikings came around (1)  
Turned us up and turned us down  
Started building boats and towns  
They tried to change our living  
tried to change our living

Cromwell and his soldiers came (2)  
Started centuries of shame  
But they could not make us turn (3)  
We are a river flowing  
We're a river flowing

Again, again the soldiers came  
Burnt our houses stole our grain  
Shot the farmers in their fields  
Working for livings  
Working for a living

800 years we have been down (4)  
The secret of the water sound  
Has kept the spirit of a man  
Above the pain descending  
Above the pain descending

Today the struggle carries on  
I wonder will I live so long  
To see the gates being opened up (5)  
To a people and their freedom  
A people and their freedom

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Notes

(1)

The first documented Viking landing took place in 795. Until the Anglo-Norman invasion in 1170 the Vikings would play an important role in Ireland, both politically and economically. They created trade routes, founded kingdoms, and built the first towns in Ireland, including Dublin, Cork and Limerick.

(2)

Oliver Cromwell landed in Ireland in August 1649 at the head of a huge army, by May 1650 he had crushed opposition in all but the West. (By 1652 the Irish population had fallen to .7 m. In 1641 it had been 1.5 m. By 1660 .5 m cattle were being exported annually to England.)

(3)

Both Cromwell's and subsequent colonisation campaigns used the twin techniques of "planting" English and Scottish settlers and forcing some locals to change or "Turn" their religion to the Protestant faith. So here he uses the ambiguity of the term "turn" to echo both the image of the unbowed Irish peasant and a metaphor for Irish History flowing like a un-turnable river.

(4)

Since the first English invasion in 1170

(5)

"Gates" here evokes both images of the be-sieged walled cities of the 17th century and also of the present day prison camps in the North of Ireland which at the time the song was being written (in the late 1970's early 1980's) were the subject of much political campaigning including Hunger Strikes by the inmates.

