

Sinéad O'Connor "Irish Ways"

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Irish ways and Irish Laws
by John Gibbs
Once upon a time there was
Irish Ways and Irish Laws
Villages of Irish blood
Waking to the morning

Then the Vikings came around (4)
Turned us up and turned us down
Started building boats and towns
They tried to change our living
They tried to change our living

Cromwell and his soldiers came (1)
Started centuries of shame
But they would not make us turn (2)
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 the fields
Working for a living
Working for a living

800 years we have been down (3)
The secrets 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 (4)
To a people and their freedom
A people and their freedom

Notes

(1) 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.)
(2) 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.

(3) The first viking invasions were in the 1100's.
(4) "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.

Send Sinead questions/info to boarjas@elof.iit.edu
and ask for the latest copy of the discography.

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