



A story of Irish extraction

David McGowan shares a treasured excerpt.*

The following extract is taken from a letter written in 1834 by James Pedlow who lived near Portadown, Co Armagh, to his namesake, a relation in America. The idiosyncratic spelling does not obscure a vivid description of an unfortunate dental experience. It is also notable for the lack of any criticism of the anonymous tooth-drawer, whoever he may have been. I used to use it to illustrate an undergraduate lecture on extraction complications, to emphasise that, particularly before antibiotics, such complications were far from trivial. The rest of the letter deals with family news, local events and farming matters and gives a fascinating insight into rural life in early 19th Century Ulster.

Drumgour, Ireland

13th of the 4th Month. 1834

Dear James,

I received thy letter dated 10 May, 1832.

Dear James, I am almost recovered after three months suffering in getting a tooth drawn.. got my jaw cloave and it beilded for 2 months then came off a piece of my jaw the size of two beans. When my jaw was cloave my teeth came so close that I could hardly put the thickness of a peney into my mouthe, There are some better and I expect the will mend. My bowel closed that I had to take a physicke 3 or 4 times every week for 4 weeks,

Thank God I have my life a little longer. I am living single yet keeps a house keper and is dowing perty well.

...

Now, dear James, to conclude I bid thee farewell, wishing thee and thy famely every blessing that plases God to bestow on thee.

Farewell, James Pedlow

When I am bidding thee farewell my eyes doth flow

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