

# "FEF FODZ FUMZ, I ZMELL THE ZMELL OF AN IRDIZMAN!"

John Joseph Borg

James Joyce, Ulysses

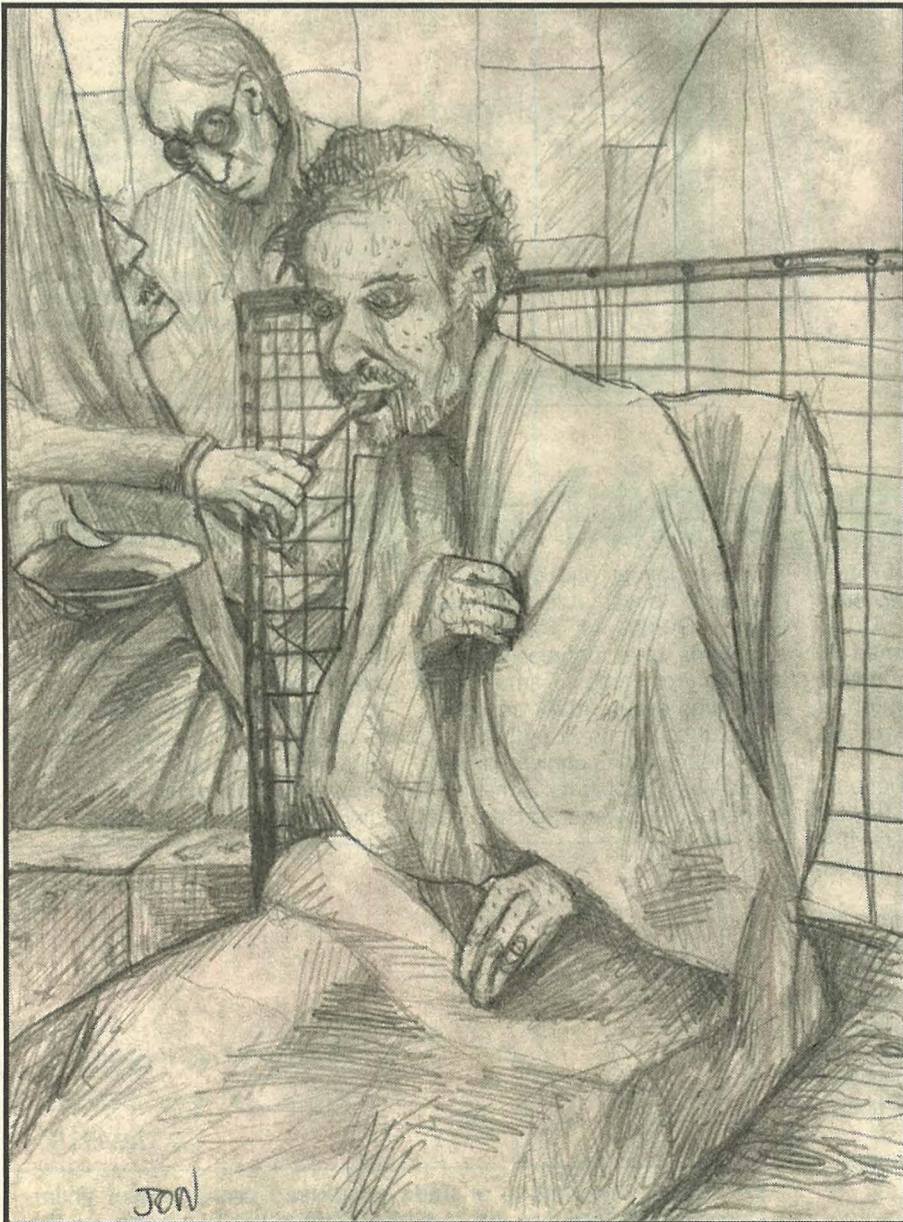
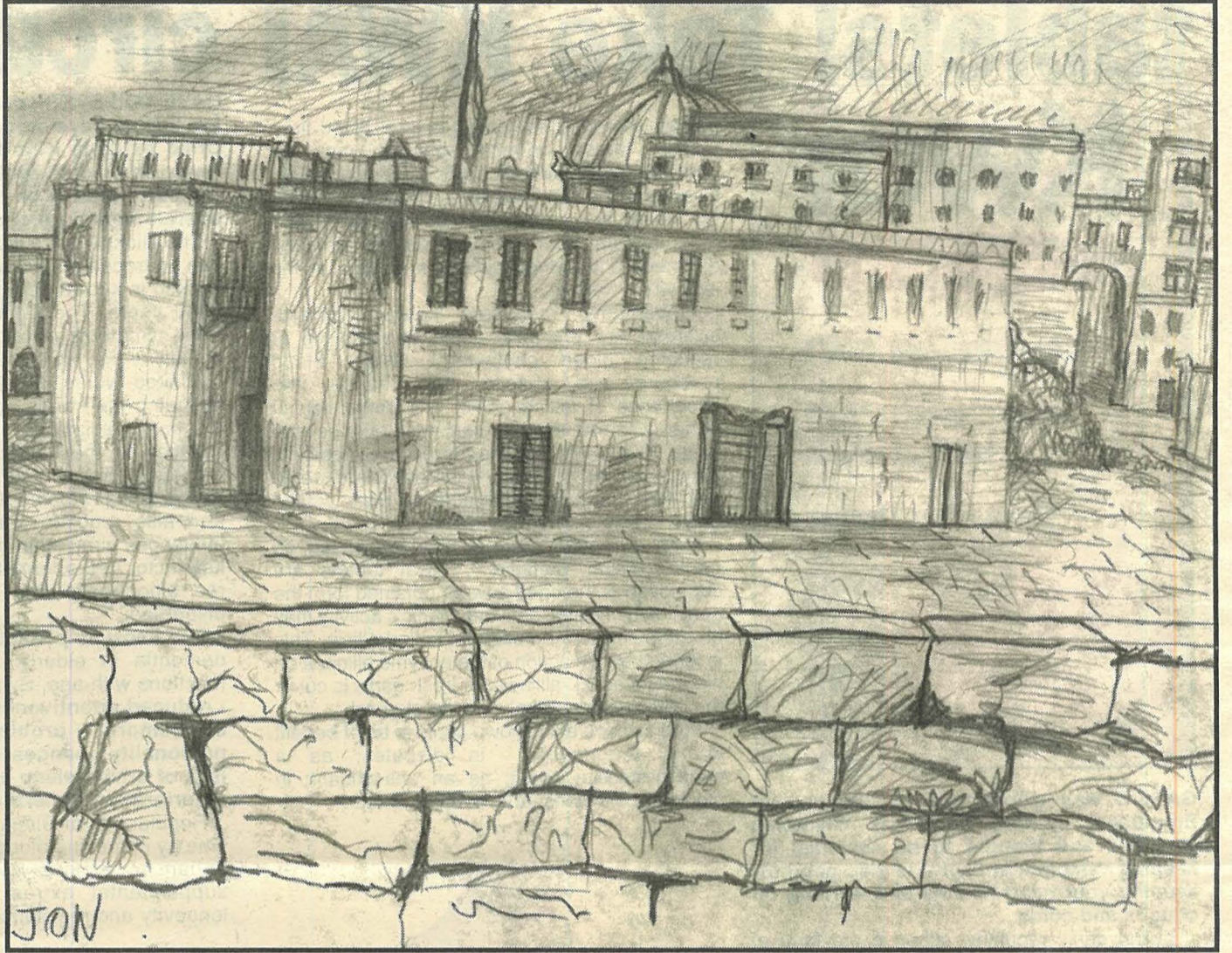
*Mr Bloom loved steak and kidney pies, his rational decision to eat them was based upon their smell. Thus, the smell/taste and appearance of food is something very important especially in hospitals both during the times of the night and especially today.*

## Food in the Holy Infirmary at Valletta

The patients hospitalised at the Holy Infirmary at Valletta during the century were treated in the best possible way. The best food was purchased by the infarmarian, whilst the food which the patients ate was chosen by the physicians and surgeons.

The consumption of chickens and cockerels to make soup was amazing, something like 1200 per week! Goat - flesh, "sweet cakes" made with sugar and ground almonds, were eaten nearly everyday. In fact, the expenditure the Infirmary had for food was one of the greatest burdens on the Treasury of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem. Something like 68361.9.13 Scudi were required to feed 153333 patients in 1781-82.

Thus, the daily cost to feed one patient was of 5.7 Scudi. Whilst it



must be known that the daily wage of a labourer in those days was less than what the Infirmary spent to feed a patient.

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century, many economical manoeuvres to cut down expenditures in the Infirmary were tried. Usually bans on fish and fresh or preserved food were made. Sugared drinks were restricted only to the Knights, whilst wine was kept under strict surveillance and given once daily to accompany the morning meal, as wine was given regularly to recompense many unpaid, or extra, or unpleasant services. Examples include:- 1) two measures of wine given to the Dominican fathers who were called to hear confessions; 2) two measures were given to ward servants who dug up graves.

The best insight view on the way in which food was delivered to patients is John Howard's written Account of the Principle Lazarettos of Europe, 1789, who states:-

"The patients are twice a day, at eight and four, served with provisions. With one Knight and the under-physician constantly attending in the two halls and seeing the distribution. From the kitchen the broth, rice, soup and vermicelli are brought in dirty kettles first to the Upper hall, and there poured into three silver bowls, out of which the patients are served. They who are in the ward for the very sick, and those who are in the middle rank of life are served in plates, dishes and spoon of silver, but the other patients (who by far the most numerous) are served in pewter. I objected to sweet cakes, and the two sorts of clammy sweet-meats, which were given to the patients. the

number of patients in this hospital during the time I was in Malta [ March 29th to April 19, 1786] was from five hundred and ten to five hundred and thirty - two."

Howard, of course, visited the hospital at the darkest period in the Order's history in Malta- less than a decade before the end of their patronage.

