

A LITERARY SPRING CLEAN



Long gone are the days where we all sit inside wrapped in our favourite duvet, with a mug of hot chocolate and a good old movie to enjoy. The days are longer, the smiles are brighter and dreams of beach days are finally within reach.

Instead of blowing away the cobwebs or dusting sand between our toes there is one place, in the heart of our capital city Valletta, which has not experienced a good dust-off in decades if not centuries. It is not the actual physical building that is mostly crying for attention and help, but rather the literary richness stored inside it.

The National Library of Malta was built by the Knights of St. John and is still considered to be one of the greatest contributions they gave to Malta. It was not, however, until they had left that this building started serving its purpose as the National Library in 1812.

It now houses a priceless collection of some of the most prestigious books, incunabula and illuminated manuscripts worldwide. The National Library is also home to the oldest

known document in Malta, from 1107 - which is a charter issued by King Baldwin of Jerusalem, confirming the donation of property to S. Salvator de Monte Tabor. Most of these treasures have been untouched and unmoved for over 200 years and are now in desperate need of new life.

New Leaf is a new NGO set up with the mission to preserve this barn of knowledge, which we are so fortunate to have in our country. There are hundreds of thousands of books that need thorough and immediate attention and many others that require dusting and cleaning.

Founded by four book lovers who were almost moved to tears at the sight of all of the majestic beauty ageing away, New Leaf is now recruiting time volunteers who share their passion for books and knowledge, to support this cause.

Primarily New Leaf is asking for volunteers to help out with cleaning the less damaged books, digitising the hand-written library cards to create a database and to contribute in local and central public lending libraries' initiatives.

Thanks to the generosity of Switch Design and Brand Strategy and E-motion, New Leaf have set up the first donation box at the entrance of the National Library of Malta to encourage visitors to contribute in a monetary way to this cause. On a larger scale, there is a list of equipment, which is required for the preservation of the books in question. This, together with a membership form and further information, can be found on the newly launched website www.newleaf.org.mt, designed by Immediastudio.



It will, without a doubt, take more than a lifetime of literary spring cleaning sessions for New Leaf to complete the journey, however, each and every book saved is one which

will be able to tell its story to future generations and thus calls for celebration and gratitude. The first preservation project concerns the first edition of the *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers* written between 1751 and 1772 which comprises 28 volumes, 11 of which are plates and all need preservation at some degree or another.

Next time you happen to be in Republic Street, Valletta, why not visit the National Library of Malta? Let the authentic fragrance of the books inspire you and take you time to appreciate the heritage and the history present in words all around. Before you leave do not forget to give a donation in aid of the books, and if that experience has been cathartic, contact New Leaf and join the cause. 

Find out how you can help by visiting www.newleaf.org.mt

