

The story of William Tyndale (1494-1536)

William Tyndale lived over 400 years ago. He was very good with words and he spoke seven different languages as well as English.



William lived in a time when most people did not own even a single book and most adults could not read. At that time even those who could read could not read the Bible, for it was not in English. The Bible had been translated into a language called Latin but not many people could read Latin.

William believed that ordinary people needed to read the Bible. He wanted to translate the Bible into English so that people could understand it. He asked the Church leaders if he could do this and was told 'NO!' Translating the Bible into English was against the law.

The Church leaders and the King did not want everybody to read the Bible. They were afraid that people might decide for themselves what the Bible said and become critical of their leaders.



King Henry VIII

They thought English was too ordinary a language for something as important as the Bible and that ordinary people were not clever enough to understand the Bible. William disagreed.



William did not give up, but he realised that he was in danger. He went to Europe and changed his name.

He had to work in secret but this did not stop him translating the Bible.



William moved from place to place with his enemies on his trail, for the King sent spies to find him. By the end of 1526 William had finished the New Testament, and just started printing it when his enemies raided the printers. William managed to escape with his New Testament and moved to another town.



Once the New Testaments were printed, they had to be smuggled into England hidden in parcels of cloth and barrels with false sections. People were at last able to hear the stories of the Bible in English. William could not print them fast enough! The Church leaders burned every copy they could find.

It was now time for William to start translating the Old Testament. To do this he had to learn Hebrew. William translated part of the Old Testament but all his work was lost when he was ship-wrecked. He had to start all over again!

Before William could finish the Bible, a spy tracked him down and told his enemies where to find him. William was arrested and put in prison. He was sentenced to death and as he died he said, 'Lord! Open the King of England's eyes'.



William's prayers were answered; a few years later Henry VIII changed his mind and William's work was used to make a Bible for all the churches in England.

William may have died but his work lives on. Many translators after him used his work to give us the complete Bible in English. His work was also used to give the people of Wales and of Scotland a Bible in their own languages.