

Friends

The 28th of September is the International Day for Universal Access to Information. This was established by the General Assembly of the United Nations, recognising that access to information has a very significant role in development, democracy and equality. Universal access to information does not mean that we all have a right to access all the information that there is, but that everyone has a right to seek, receive and impart information. It allows for joined up governance and individual thought.

Free access to information isn't always helpful, and the early release by the press of plans to take Goose Green during the Falkland Islands conflict is widely credited with the deaths of more people than might otherwise have been the case. Yet the importance of information and our ability to learn things cannot be overstated. William Tyndale, (1494 – 1536) was the first person to translate the New Testament directly from Greek to English, believing that everyone should be able to read and understand the Bible. This was not popular among the English clergy, who thought he was a troublemaker, and he moved to Germany to publish the translation, smuggling six thousand copies into England hidden inside bales of wool and wine casks with false bottoms.

Both the Bishop of London, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Thomas Moore, were unhappy with his footnotes, which criticised the Roman Catholic Church and with his translation of certain words. Henry VIII was also opposed to Bibles in English and although Tyndale started to prepare an Old Testament translation, he was arrested and executed before finishing it. Bravely, his friend Miles Coverdale, a priest, picked up the baton and completed the work.

Our ability to read the Bible, to understand it, and to seek information to comprehend it better comes in a direct line from

William Tyndale and his supporters, and perhaps reminds us that we are only enabled to “stand on the shoulders of giants” because of those who insisted that irrespective of race, creed or academic abilities, we should be allowed to seek knowledge and to pursue it.

God bless, Vicci