

FreeCEN Newsletter – April 2026

Hello All

Welcome to the FreeCEN newsletter for April, and 39 new pieces have been added to the website since the last edition, around 175,000 entries between these pieces. Details at the end of this newsletter.

Congratulations to the Anglesey team of transcribers as the 1841 census for the county is now complete and all pieces now part of the online searchable database.

These newsletters are sent on a monthly basis, and are usually sent out around the 4th of the month.

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Contribution Guidelines

Contributions are welcome, and all received are considered. These should be emailed to [Chris Mahoney](mailto:chris.mahoney@freeukgenealogy.org.uk) (chris.mahoney@freeukgenealogy.org.uk).

They can be in any format, but I do have three particular requests with contributions.

1. Please do include a scanned image of the census record referred to (if appropriate) along with relevant source information (i.e. piece number, folio number, page number, and schedule number)
2. With any images, please include copies in their original format such as jpg or png (much easier to work with than copying one out of your article)
3. If you have quoted another source (or copied an image from somewhere), please quote what that source is

Previous FreeCEN Newsletters

Past editions of the newsletter are [now available to download](#) from the FreeCEN website. Or go to the “About” page, and then look on the right hand side under “See Also”.

The previous twelve are there now, all in downloadable PDF format (can also be read in some internet browsers). Older editions available on request.

Volunteer for FreeCEN

Like what you see in these newsletters? Has our website helped you with your family research? Then please consider helping to expand our database. We have plenty of coordinators who would welcome you as a member of their team.

You need only basic computer skills and you can use any spreadsheet app. We provide plenty of help and support. We also supply the scans.

Use this link to the [Volunteer page](#) or select “Volunteer” in the purple menu bar near the top of any page on the website.

News from Denise Colbert (Q1 2026)

(Chief Operating Officer, Free UK Genealogy CIO)

Hello everyone

In my last update, I reflected on a very full end to the year, including the Strategy Weekend, the launch of FreeBMD2, and the progress we've been making with FreePRO. Over the past few months, we've been building on that work, starting to turn those discussions into something more tangible.

FreePRO (FreePROBATE) is beginning to take clearer shape as we move towards the pilot phase. We now have the first 5 books digitised, and we have been trying things out, refining how we work, and getting a better sense of how the project will run in practice. We've also started bringing some transcriber/data processing volunteers onboard and thinking more carefully about how we support them. I'm very pleased to share that Ramona Ceia has joined us as a volunteer Project Manager for FreePRO, bringing some much-needed structure as the project grows. It's still early days, but we are moving, steadily, from planning into doing.

Following its release at the end of last year, the new FreeBMD (**FreeBMD2**) has continued to evolve. A good deal of time this quarter has gone into responding to feedback and improving performance. The site is now running *much* faster than it was at launch, which has made a real difference to how it feels to use. We have also continued to reassure users that FreeBMD1 remains available, while FreeBMD2 develops alongside it. That balance matters as people find their way around the newer version.

We've also spent time on **FreeBMD1** itself, particularly around advertising. We know the sticky footer advert affects usability, and we are exploring ways to remove or replace it without putting essential income at risk. We have also looked closely at the quality of adverts being shown. When users choose not to accept personalised advertising, the adverts available come from a smaller pool, which can sometimes mean they feel more generic or lower quality. This sits largely within user control through cookie preferences, and it directly affects both what is shown and the revenue it generates. It is not a simple balance to strike, and we are continuing to work through it carefully.

FreeREG and **FreeCEN** continue to grow thanks to your contributions. Both Steering Committees have been continuing work on themes that were revisited and strengthened at the Strategy Weekend, particularly around how we support volunteers and nurture our sense of community. We've begun to shape what a future online Community Hub might look like, alongside wider thinking about how we encourage and help volunteers take on new roles.

Access to source images remains one of the biggest challenges for both projects. We haven't made major changes yet, but it has been one of the most useful areas of discussion this quarter. Coordinators have shared thoughtful and practical ideas in open meetings, which are helping us think through how we might find and secure more sources in future. We would very much welcome more Coordinators joining those conversations.

One of the more encouraging outcomes of the Strategy Weekend has been the idea of a UK Genealogy Charity Summit, bringing organisations together to share challenges and explore how we might work more closely. Planning is now underway, with the aim of holding this in April. It could be a great positive step towards stronger collaboration across the sector.

Development of **FreeComETT-REG** has been slower this quarter. Still an important part of our plans to make transcription easier and better supported for FreeREG volunteers, progress has been affected by the lack of project management capacity and limited availability from our volunteer Lead Developer. I'm therefore very pleased that Gareth Woolley has joined us as a volunteer Project Manager for FreeComETT-REG. This should help us regain momentum and move things forward more steadily.

There has been some very positive progress in the wider FreeComETT space, however. I'd like to celebrate the work of Hilary Wright and the FreeBMD Coordinators who worked closely with him on the successful release of version 7 of **FreeComETT-BMD**. Our antipodean volunteers in particular will have noticed a difference, with loading times improving from painfully slow to impressively fast. It's a great example of what can be achieved through collaboration and persistence.

I'd also like to take a moment to recognise Scott Paget, who has joined us as a Programme Manager volunteer. He has played an important role in supporting our newer projects, particularly in helping us bring in volunteer Project Managers. Behind-the-scenes work on recruitment processes is beginning to make a real difference to our volunteer capacity.

As always: thank you, all of you, for everything you contribute to Free UK Genealogy. Your time, care, and commitment make all of this possible.

With thanks for everything you do,

Denise Colbert
Chief Operating Officer
Free UK Genealogy CIO

FreeCEN Newsletter – Steering Committee Update

(16 March 2026)

Key Priorities for 2026

The Steering Committee has agreed a clear set of priorities to guide FreeCEN during 2026, based on the updated Priorities and Risks framework.

The main areas of focus are:

- Quality – completing remaining data improvements (including cross-county work)
- Value – improving search functionality and usability
- Growth – increasing transcription activity and strengthening coordinator support

A key issue identified is the shortage of legally usable images, which is now limiting transcription activity and volunteer engagement.

Images and Transcription Work

Feedback from coordinators confirmed that:

- The main constraint is lack of images, not lack of transcribers
- In many counties, transcribers are available but there is insufficient material to work on

The Committee agreed that improving the match between available images and active volunteers is a priority.

- Work continues on the CAP (image catalogue) to:
 - Identify what images are already held
 - Highlight gaps in coverage
 - Support better allocation of transcription work

Image Sourcing – What’s Next

A range of options for sourcing images were reviewed:

- National Archives bulk purchase is likely to be too expensive
- Volunteer downloading from TNA has limited impact (low volume)
- Commercial CD-based sources remain restricted
- S&N Genealogy may be approached regarding transcription licensing
- Other sources (including secondary markets) continue to be used where permitted

The Committee agreed that new approaches are needed, and that image sourcing must be addressed strategically.

Coordinator Input

Thank you to everyone who contributed feedback.

- Your input confirmed:
 - Where the main challenges lie
 - The importance of aligning images with available volunteers
 - The need for practical support and clearer prioritisation
- This feedback will inform:
 - Future recruitment planning
 - Image sourcing priorities
 - Improvements to coordinator support

Technical and Data Updates

Thank you to everyone who contributed feedback.

- Work continues on Place of Birth (POB) search and diacritics
- Revalidation work is nearing completion, with only a small number of files remaining
- Technical updates are ongoing, including a planned password reset for all volunteers

The next Steering Committee meeting will take place on Monday 20 April 2026.

FreeCEN Vacancies

If you are interested in becoming one of our county coordinators, then this is for you as we have some roles that we would like to fill. Experience at transcribing and proofreading for FreeCEN is preferable. Help and support is available if needed.

We have the following vacancies at present:

Hereford

County has been inactive for a while so no active transcribers at this time. One year is fully transcribed with some pieces from other years also complete. We do have scans we can supply you with.

Sussex

County has no coordinator at present, and has been vacant for a while, so no active transcribers at this time. Three years are fully transcribed, with another close to it. Some of the uploaded pieces however do need re-validating (but we may already have someone to do these re-validations). We do have scans we can supply you with.

If you are interested in taking on one of these counties, or would like to know more, please let us know.

Individual Returns on the 1861 Census

As most of us know the census data we generally see on earlier years are the enumerator summaries for any given district and piece with the returns done by each individual household not being retained.

However, during the validation of a Pembroke 1861 piece, there was an individual householder's return. So, for the benefit of those of you who have not seen one and are curious as to what they look like, here it is.

CENSUS OF ENGLAND AND WALES, 1861.

HOUSEHOLDERS' SCHEDULE.

TO THE OCCUPIER.

You are requested to insert the particulars specified on the other page, in compliance with an Act which passed the House of Commons, and the House of Lords, in the last Session of Parliament, and received the assent of Her Majesty The Queen on the 6th of August, 1858.

This Paper will be CALLED FOR on MONDAY, APRIL 8th, by the appointed Enumerator,

and it is desirable that you send of that day, in order that his progress may not be delayed. It will be his duty, under the Act, to complete the return if it be defective, and to correct it if erroneous. Any person authorized by you may write in the particulars if you are yourself unable to do so.

Persons who refuse to give correct information, are liable to a Penalty of Five Pounds, besides the inconvenience and annoyance of appearing before two Justices of the Peace, and being convicted of having made a willful mis-statement of age, or of any of the other particulars.

The Return is required to enable the Secretary of State to complete the SEVENTH CENSUS; which is to show the exact numbers, ages, and condition of the people—their arrangement by families in different ranks, professions, and trades—their distribution over the country in villages, towns, and cities—their increase and progress during the last ten years.

The facts will be published in General Abstracts only, and strict care will be taken that the returns are not used for the gratification of curiosity.

Approved,
G. C. LEWIS,
House Office, Whitehall, Nov. 12th, 1860.

GENERAL INSTRUCTION.

This Paper is to be filled up by the OCCUPIER or Person in charge of the dwelling.

If the house is let or sub-let to different Families or Lodgers, each OCCUPIER or LODGER must make a return for his portion of the house upon a SEPARATE PAPER.

(See Examples of the mode of filling up the Return.)

INSTRUCTIONS for filling up the Column headed "RANK, PROFESSION or OCCUPATION."

The Superior Titles of PEERS and other Persons of RANK to be inserted, as well as any high office which they may hold. Magistrates, Aldermen, and other important public officers, to state their profession after their official title.

ARMY AND NAVY.—Add, after the rank, "Army," "Artillery," "Royal Navy," "Royal Engineers," "Marines," "East India Service," as the case may be. Officers on "half-pay" or "retired," to be so described. Chelsea, Greenwich, and other Pensions, to be so designated.

Persons in the CIVIL SERVICE to state the Department to which they are attached, after their rank; those on the Superannuation List to be so distinguished.

CLERGYMEN of the Church of England to return themselves as "Rector of—," "Vicar of—," "Curate of—," &c., or "ecclesiastical care of family." They are requested not to employ the indefinite term "Clerk." Roman Catholic Priests, and Ministers of Foreign Churches, to return themselves as such, and to state the name and Missions to return themselves as "Independent Minister of—," "Chapel," "Wesleyan Minister of Chapel," &c. Local or occasional preachers must return their ordinary occupations; but may add "Local Methodist preacher," &c., &c.

LEGAL PROFESSION.—Barristers, to state whether or not in actual practice; Officers of any Court, &c., to state the description of office and name of Court. The designation "Attorney" or "Solicitor" to be confined to those whose names are actually upon the Roll. Clerks in Solicitors' offices should state whether Solicitor's Managing, Article, or General Clerk.

Members of the **MEDICAL PROFESSION** to state the University, College, or Hall, of which they are Graduates, Fellows, or Licentiates; also whether they practice as Physician, Surgeon, Dentist, Oculist, General Practitioner, &c., or are "not practising."

PROFESSORS, TEACHERS, PUBLIC WRITERS, Authors, and Scientific men.—to state the particular branch of Science or Literature which they teach or pursue; Artists, the art which they cultivate. Graduates should enter their degrees in this column.

PERSONS ENGAGED IN COMMERCE, as Merchants, Brokers, Agents, Commercial Travellers, to state in all cases the particular kind of business in which they are engaged, or the staple in which they chiefly deal. Members of the Stock Exchange, East India Merchants, &c., may be so described.

Commercial **CLERKS**—always add in what branch of business. (Note—Clerks in the Civil Service, and in Solicitors' offices, should be distinguished as above directed.)

The term **FARMER** to be applied only to the occupiers of land. Example: "Farmer of 317 acres, employing 8 laborers and 3 boys;" the actual number of acres, and of men and boys employed on the farm, on April 8th, being in all cases inserted. Sons or daughters employed at home or on the farm, may be returned—"Farmer's Son," "Farmer's Daughter." **FARM SERVANTS** sleeping in the Farmer's house must be described in his schedule as "Carter," "Dairymaid," &c., as the case may be. An out-door **LABORER** working on a farm must be described as "Agricultural Laborer;" "Shepherd," &c., as the case may be.

In **TRADES, MANUFACTURES,** or other Business, the Employer must, in all cases, be distinguished; Example: "Carpenter—Master, employing 6 men and 2 boys," inserting always the number of persons of the trade in his employ, if any, on April 8th. In the case of **FIXES**, the number of persons employed should be returned by no other only.

In the case of **WORKERS in MINES or MANUFACTURES**, and generally in the AIDERS, the particular BRANCH of work, and the MATERIALS, are always to be distinctly expressed if they are not implied in the name, as in "Coal-miner," "Iron-founder," "Silk-drawers." Where the trade is much subdivided, both TRADES and BRANCHES are to be returned thus—"Watchmaker—Finisher;" "Printer—Compositor."

ARTISANS and MECHANICS should invariably state their particular branch of art or business.

WEAVERS should always write "Silk," "Wool," "Worsted," "Cotton," &c., before this general term, so as to express distinctly the material which he weaves, thus—"Silk Weaver."

MESSENGERS, PORTERS, LABORERS, and **SERVANTS**, to be described according to the nature of their employment on the day of the Census.

A person following MORE THAN ONE TRADE or BUSINESS should insert his several occupations in the order of their importance.

Persons following no Profession, Trade, or calling, and holding no public office, but deriving their incomes chiefly from land, houses, mines, dividends, interest of money, annuities, &c., may designate themselves: "Landlord Proprietor," "Proprietor of Iron Mines," "Proprietor of Houses," "Fund-holder," &c., as the case may be. Persons who have attained great success may be entered thus—"Retired Farmer," "Enriched Grocer."

Persons in Almshouses, after being described as such, should state their previous occupations.

WOMEN and CHILDREN to be entered according to the above Instructions. The occupations of those who are regularly employed from home, or who follow any business at home, to be distinctly recorded. Against the names of children, daily attending school, or receiving regular tuition at home, write "Scholar."

LIST of the MEMBERS of this FAMILY, of VISITORS, and of SERVANTS, who SLEPT or ABODE in this Dwelling on the NIGHT of 66
SUNDAY, APRIL 7th, 1861.

NAME and SURNAME	RELATION to Head of Family	CONDITION	SEX	AGE (Last Birthday)	RANK, PROFESSION, or OCCUPATION	WHERE BORN	If Dead-and-Dumb, or Blind
<p>No. Person absent on the Night of Sunday, April 7th, to be entered here; every one who may be TRAVELLING or out of Home during that Night, and who RETURNS HOME on MONDAY, APRIL 8th.</p> <p>Write after the Name of the Head of the Family the names of his Wife, Children, and other Relatives, then Visitors, &c., and Servants.</p> <p>Write either "Married," "Widowed," or "Single," against the Name of all Persons except Young Children.</p> <p>Write "M" against Males, and "F" against Females.</p> <p>Particulars under One Year, state the AGE in the next column, and "1 Month," "2 Months," &c.</p> <p>(Before filling up this Column, you are requested to read the Instructions on the other side.)</p> <p>Opposite the Names of those born in England, write the County, and Town or Parish.</p> <p>If born in Scotland, Ireland, the British Colonies, or the East Indies, state the County.</p> <p>If born in Foreign parts state the Country; and if also a British Subject add "British Subject;" or "Naturalized British Subject," as the case may be.</p> <p>Write "Dead-and-Dumb," or "Blind," against the Name of the Person; and if so from Birth, add "from Birth."</p>							
Richard A. Thomas	Head of Family						
Elizabeth	Wife						
George Thomas	Servant	Unmarried	M	17	1st work	Pembroke	
Elizabeth Lewis	do	Unmarried	F	19	do	do	
End of the Parish of St. Florence							
I declare the foregoing to be a true Return, according to the best of my knowledge and belief.							
Witness my Hand, (Signature)							

Pieces Incorporated during March 2026

Information on pieces uploaded during March 2026 was not available at the time the April 2026 newsletter was ready due to a website fault so will include next month.

Apologies for this.

FreeCEN1

The last reported update to our old website at [FreeCEN1](#) took place on July 6th 2021. Further updates to this website have been discontinued, and any new uploads of completed pieces will take place on FreeCEN2 only.

We expect that the old website will be taken off-line at some point.