

FreeCEN Newsletter – December 2025

Hello All

Welcome to the FreeCEN newsletter for December 2025, and 50 new pieces have been added to the website since the last edition, around 230,000 entries between these pieces. Details at the end of this newsletter.

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

The [FreeCEN Roadmap](#) has been updated, and available for you to view on the website. You can also log onto the website, where the link for this is one of those listed under “Actions”.

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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](mailto: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 (Q3 2025)

(Chief Operating Officer, Free UK Genealogy CIO)

Hello everyone,

As we head into the final part of the year, I wanted to share an update on what we've been working on over the summer months. It's been a busy time, with steady progress across our key projects and a great deal of preparation for the months ahead.

FreePRO (FreePROBATE) has continued to move forward. After receiving the larger sample of probate book images earlier in the year, the team have been refining both the workflow and the structure of the outputs we'll need once transcription begins. Alongside this, fundraising has been a major focus throughout the quarter. I'm delighted to share that we reached our £10,000 pledge target for FreePRO in the Big Give Christmas Challenge. This is the highest pledge total we've ever achieved, and it reflects the generosity and belief the genealogy community has in the project. This support gives us a strong foundation heading into December's match-funding week. If you weren't able to make a pledge but would still like to support the project, donations made [on our campaign page](#) between 2 and 9 December will be doubled and will make a real difference to how quickly we can launch the website.

If you're interested in getting involved with FreePRO as the project develops, we'd love to hear from you. Just drop us a line at FreePRO.volunteers@freeukgenealogy.org.uk and we'll keep you updated as volunteer opportunities open up.

FreeBMD2 has been going through its final refinements as we moved closer to launch. Tester feedback helped us smooth out some issues, and work continued on preparing the site for public release. At the same time, we've been looking carefully at FreeBMD's long-term sustainability, exploring options around advertising that meet our financial needs while preserving the user experience.

FreeREG and **FreeCEN** have both continued to grow, with volunteers adding and updating records throughout the quarter. We've also been thinking more about how to encourage and support volunteers who may want to step into wider responsibilities. This has connected naturally with our early thinking around a future online Community Hub for all FreeUKGEN volunteers, to improve the volunteer experience, enhance communication, and strengthen our sense of community across all three projects.

Work on **FreeComETT-REG**, the forthcoming transcription tool for FreeREG, has continued in the background. Although there is not much news to share publicly yet, it remains an important part of our longer-term plan to make transcription simpler and more accessible.

Much of my own time this quarter was taken up with the planning of October's Strategy Weekend. Coordinating the programme, preparing materials, working with trustees and steering committees, and making sure our volunteers can join both in person and online has been a substantial piece of work. The weekend itself sits in Q4, but the groundwork for it has been one of the major activities of Q3, helping ensure we are ready for constructive discussions about Quality, Value, Growth, and the future of our community.

It has been a full and productive summer, and the work done over these months has laid strong foundations for the busy period to come, including the Strategy Weekend and the Big Give campaign.

With thanks for everything you bring to our community,

Denise, COO

FreeCEN Steering Committee Bulletin – October 2025

(Summary of meeting held October 20th)

Committee Updates

- Chair Election: Geoff Jarvis was unanimously elected as Chair. His technical input will continue alongside his facilitation role.
- New Member Proposed: Dr. Oliver Duke-Williams (UCL, FreeCEN user) was approved (pending Trustee confirmation) to join the Steering Committee as an external academic expert.

SWOT Feedback

- Survey responses increased to 10, highlighting:
 - - Strengths: Free access, accuracy, and skilled volunteers.
 - - Weaknesses: Volunteer decline, limited fresh data, low transcriber engagement.
 - - Opportunities: Recruit more volunteers, integrate cross-project search.
 - - Threats: Cybersecurity, volunteer fatigue, inconsistent data quality.
- Engagement and volunteer retention remain a top priority.

Group Coordinator Meeting

- Scheduled for Wednesday 5 November 2025, 09:00–10:00 (UK).
- Purpose: Introduce the Steering Committee, share priorities, and answer coordinator questions.

Project and Roadmap Updates

- FreeCEN1 Closure Planning: FreeCEN1 remains inaccessible. Closure will not proceed until PoB search is complete in FreeCEN2 (est. 3–6 months). Trustee approval required.
- Newsletter Process (#1554): Newsletter improvements continue.
- Bouquets System (#1454): Still in development; no update this month.
- Coordinator Vacancies: Roles in Sussex, Hereford, and Nottingham remain open. Recruitment advert to be shared at November meeting.
- Legal advice pending on data usage compliance.
- POB Search & Diacritics (#1844): UTF-8 and diacritic support is underway. Cross-project collaboration in planning.
- Revalidation & Border Splits (#1853 / #1530): Data validation continues (Yorkshire, Derbyshire, Devon). FreeCEN2 now reflects corrected data.

Legal & Governance

- Brodies Legal Advice: Covers third-party data reuse. Compliance depends on licence terms. Summary due in November.
- Internal Communication: Full minutes will not be shared. Coordinators will receive bulletins (like this) instead.
- Volunteer Engagement: Work is underway to unify communication strategies across FreeUKGEN projects.

Next Meeting

- Monday 17 November 2025, 09:00–10:00 (UK Time)

FreeCEN Steering Committee Bulletin – November 2025

This bulletin provides a concise update from the FreeCEN Steering Committee meeting held on 17 November 2025.

Key Outcomes:

- Steering Committee is drafting the FreeCEN Priorities & Risks document for review at the next meeting
- Coordinator Meeting Success – First coordinators' meeting (5 Nov) well-received; quarterly meetings set for March, June, September, November.
- Volunteer Recruitment – New recruitment drive planned for early 2026; approaches include pop-ups, “recruit a friend,” and targeted outreach.
- Proofread-Then-Validate – Approved for small/high-quality pieces; larger or complex files still require independent validation.
- Major Technical Upgrade – Ruby/Rails/MongoDB upgrade scheduled over Christmas; short planned downtime expected.
- A formal beta test plan is being developed and Coordinators will receive direct information shortly
- FreeCEN1 Status – Now operational. Closure postponed until FreeCEN2's new search (incl. POB) is fully implemented and stable.
- Revalidation – Ongoing; West Riding remains the largest section; Devon and Durham progress continuing.
- Diacritics / UTF-8 – Awaiting Technical Steering Committee decision.
- Brodies Legal Advice – Confirms S&N/FHS CD images cannot be used for transcription due to personal-use licence restrictions.

Next Meeting

Monday 15 December 2025, 09:00–10:00 (Google Meet)

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.

Nottingham

County has five years fully transcribed, with a sixth only needing a few pieces proofread before that one is complete. There are a small number of transcribers working on the remaining two years. 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.

When punctuation tells a story: what one census page reveals about Victorian life

(Various Contributors)

How much meaning can a few question marks carry? A surprising amount, as one FreeCEN volunteer discovered while transcribing an 1851 census page from Hull

When our FreeCEN volunteers transcribe old census returns, they sometimes meet moments where history seems to speak directly from the page. One volunteer recently came across an 1851 census entry from Hull where the enumerator had listed occupations such as “Prostitute” and “Dress Maker Prostitute”, and then added his own punctuation: “Lodging house!!!” and “Dress Maker?” (Refer to the article on prostitutes page 11 for the original query from the transcriber)

Those marks of exclamation and doubt are not just decoration. They hint at the judgements and assumptions of the time and remind us that census records were written by human hands, shaped by the culture of their day.

The historian’s dilemma

For our transcribers, that raises a question: how far should we go in reproducing those flourishes?

Our systems are designed to keep the data clear and searchable, which means certain punctuation marks are restricted in occupation fields. Yet, as volunteers discussed, removing them can strip away a layer of meaning. The consensus was a thoughtful one: record the occupation plainly, but use the Notes field to capture any added punctuation or emphasis, so researchers can see both the facts and the flavour of the original record.

The importance of accuracy, accents included

Another volunteer pointed out that similar issues arise with diacritics in Welsh names, such as the *tô* bach (the “little roof”) in Tŷ Mawr. These accents are not optional; they change the sound and sometimes the meaning of a word.

Our validation software occasionally objects to them, but that is something we are fixing. The correct spelling should always win.

Why details matter

Every squiggle, accent, or exclamation mark offers a glimpse into the past: a local accent, a moment of moral judgement, or the habits of an overworked census enumerator. By thinking carefully about how we capture these small details, our volunteers help keep the historical record honest and humane.

What's next

We are updating our internal handbook and transcription tools to make sure punctuation and accents are treated properly. As always, the discussion among volunteers helps shape those improvements, demonstrating the collaborative spirit that keeps FreeCEN thriving.

A shared effort

Behind every name in the census is a story, and behind every transcription is a volunteer who has taken the time to get it right. Their curiosity, care and conversations, sometimes about the tiniest marks on a page, help bring history to life for everyone.

Prostitutes

(From David Hemsworth)

I am currently in what must be the red light district of 1851 Hull. While a number of young women have "Prostitute" or "Dress Maker Prostitute", for example, as their given occupation, some other woman in this area appear to have their given occupations challenged by the enumerator with question and exclamation marks. "Lodging house!!!", for example, appears to infer something like "Come off it, Lizzy, you're a knocking shop, aren't you!" "Dress Maker?" appears to carry a similar blunt message.

Difficult to know whether these question and exclamation marks were added down the line, but as they appear to add meaning to the entries and reveal apparent rule-breaking by an enumerator in challenging given information, I have included them in my transcription.

		Mary G. - 20	25 Jan?							
60	1 do	Holmes Court	Mary A. Chadwick	Head	W	22		Lodging house!!!		
61	2 do		Nanah Matney	Head	W	26		Lodging!!!		
			Richard Bray	Lodger	W	26		Lab. Name		
			Jacob Plunk	Lodger	W	26		Washerwoman?		
			Thomas Brumfleet	20	W	29		Lab		
62	3 do		Elizabeth Blaydes	Head	W	24		Prostitute,		
			Morcha Coates	20	W	24		do		
63	4 do		Mary Hayton	Head	W	22		Dr. Makr do		
64	5 do		Jane Benson	Head	W	36		Chewwoman do		
			James Smallwood	Lodger	W	32		Sailor		
65	5 Manor St		Elizabeth Shaffy Mean	W	33			Lodging Housekeeper!		

(From Yorkshire 1851 Piece HO107_2362)

Unusual Occupations

(From Bev Howlett)

The occupation for Ann STANNERS second entry on the page is shown as Keeping Her Husband In Order, it was crossed through but I would just love to know what her husband got up to.

Schedule	Address	ed	Building (B.)	Domestic	Family	Marriage	Male	Female	Profession or occupation	Parish
35	Hazel Grove Cottage	1							Professor of Applied Art & Art lecturer for Science & Art Dept X	
					Hugh H. Stanners	Head	M	51		Yorkshire Sheffield
					Ann W.	Wife	M	32	Keeping her husband in order	Surrey Camberwell
					Kathleen	Daughter	S		Art Student	Surrey South Lambeth
					Hugh L.	Son	S	18	Scholar	Middlesex Marylebone
					Ethel A. L.	Daughter	S		Do	Surrey Kensington
					Emmice A. Brown	S	22		Mother's Help/Dom	Middlesex Paddington
					Rose Stevens	Serv	S	78	Maid Servant Domestic	Kent Deptford
					Eric L. Russell	Waiter	S		Scholar	Surrey Stockwell
										Do

(From Surrey 1891 Piece RG12_570)

Pieces Uploaded in November 2025

Table: the pieces are sorted alphabetically by county (or shipping group), then year, then piece number

County	Year	Piece	Location	Civil Parishes	Number of Entries
Anglesey	1841	HO107_1359	Maltraeth	Aberffraw, (Bod Feirig; Bod Gedrwydd; Cefntreffraw; Dindrysal; Grigor; Hen Llys; Llawr-y-Dref and Cnwe; Pen Rhynn), Cerrigceinwen, Heneglwys, Llangadwaladr, Llangristiolus, Llangwyfan, Trefdraeth (Yard)	5,032
Argyllshire	1851	HS5_505	Ardnamurchan	Acharacle, Moidart, S Morar-Arisaig, Strontian, W Ardnamurchan	1,206
Berkshire	1891	RG12_1006	Bracknell	Binfield, Bracknell, Easthampstead, Warfield	4,994
Cambridgeshire	1861	RG9_1044	March	Doddington, (March; Wimblington), March, Wimblington	6,667
Cambridgeshire	1881	RG11_1666	St Andrew the Less	Cambridge, Cambridge St Andrew the Less	5,137
Cardiganshire	1911	RG14_33319	Penbryn	Troedyraur	327

Cheshire	1891	RG12_2800	Stockport First	Cheadle, Cheadle Bulkeley, Cheadle Moseley, Stockport	930
Devon	1851	HO107_1865	East Budleigh	Bicton, (Yettington), Colaton Raleigh (Blackbury; Bystock; Grindle; Hawkerland or Hockerland; Kingston; Stonyford; Stowford), Dotton, East Budleigh (Budleigh Salterton; Great Knowle; Little Knowle), Otterton	4,800
Devon	1851	HO107_1890	Bampton	Bampton, Clayhanger, Hockworthy, Huntsham, Morebath	3,491
Devon	1881	RG11_2126	Lyme	Uplyme	931
Dorset	1861	RG9_1370A	Lyme	Charmouth, Lyme Regis	3,564
Dorset	1881	RG11_2126A	Lyme	Charmouth, Lyme Regis	2,989
Dorset	1891	RG12_1666A	Lyme	Charmouth, Lyme Regis	2,985
Essex	1861	RG9_1074	Orsett	Bulphan, Chadwell St Mary, Corringham, East Tilbury, Fobbing, Horndon on the Hill, Laindon, Laindon Hills, Mucking, Orsett, Stanford le Hope, West Tilbury	5,276

Essex	1861	RG9_1077	Wickford	Basildon, Bowers Gifford (Canvey Island), Downham, Laindon (Basildon), Nevendon, North Benfleet (Canvey Island), Pitsea (Canvey Island), Vange (Canvey Island), Wickford	2,086
Essex	1891	RG12_1358	Walthamstow	Walthamstow	7,198
Glamorganshire	1891	RG12_4432	Gelligaer	Gelligaer, Hengoed, Ysgwyddgwyn	6,705
Gloucestershire	1861	RG9_1718	Bristol St Paul	Bristol St Paul In	5,749
Huntingdonshire	1881	RG11_1600	Ramsey	Great Raveley, Little Raveley, Ramsey, Upwood	5,310
Inverness-shire	1841	HS4_112	Kilmuir		3,632
Kent	1901	RG13_790	Chartham	Holy Cross Westgate Without, Milton Next Canterbury, Thanington Within, Thanington Without	1,560
Lancashire	1891	RG12_3087	Westleigh	Pennington, West Leigh	8,340
Lancashire	1891	RG12_3143	Radcliffe	Radcliffe	2,751
Lancashire	1891	RG12_3216	Greengate	Salford	3,207
Lancashire	1891	RG12_3250	St George	Manchester	6,673
Lancashire	1891	RG12_3275	Ashton Town	Ashton under Lyne	7,608

Lancashire	1891	RG12_3357	Accrington	Accrington, Baxenden	3,164
Leicestershire	1891	RG12_2719A	Castle Donington	Castle Donington, Cavendish Bridge, Diseworth, Hemington, Isley Walton, Kegworth, Langley Priory, Lockington	5,876
Lincolnshire	1841	HO107_632	East Bolingbroke Soke	Bag Enderby, Dalby (Dexthorpe), Dalderby, Donington on Bain, Driby, Dunholme, Eastville, Edlington, Elsham, Epworth, North Elkington, South Elkington (Ackthorpe), South Elkington (Coach Grange)	4,118
Lincolnshire	1851	HO107_2111A	Louth	Brackenborough, Burwell, Farforth (Maidenwell), Fotherby, Hallington, Haugham, Keddington, Legbourne, Little Cawthorpe, Little Grimsby, Louth (Louth Park), Muckton, North Elkington, Oxcombe, Raithby cum Maltby, Ruckland, South Elkington (Ackthorpe; Coach Grange), Stewton, Tathwell (Cadwell; Dovendale), Utterby, Welton le Wold, Withcall, Worlaby	5,121
Merionethshire	1871	RG10_5688	Talylllyn	Llanymawddwy, Mallwyd, Talylllyn	3,076
Merionethshire	1871	RG10_5700	Tremadoc	Llanfihangel y Pennant	687
Montgomeryshire	1871	RG10_5688A	Talylllyn	Mallwyd, (Caereinion Fechan)	96

Northamptonshire	1891	RG12_1200	All Saints	Dallington, (Duston; Kingsthorpe; St James's End), Duston, Kingsthorpe	8,796
Northamptonshire	1891	RG12_1201	All Saints	All Saints, Dallington (All Saints;Northampton), Kingsthorpe	7,851
Northamptonshire	1891	RG12_1202	All Saints	All Saints, Dallington (St Peter), St Peters	7,400
Northumberland	1851	HO107_2410	Tynemouth	Tynemouth, (Cullercoates; Monkseaton with Shire Moor Allotment;Tynemouth;Whitley with Hotspur Place and Whitley Row)	16,353
Nottinghamshire	1891	RG12_2719B	Castle Donington	Kingston, Ratcliffe on Soar	419
Somerset	1851	HO107_1890AA	Dulverton	Brompton Regis, Brushford, Dulverton, Exford, Exmoor, Exton, Hawkridge, Huish Champflower, Skilgate, Upton, Winsford, Withypool	6,117
Somerset	1911	RG14_14278	Bridgwater	Bridgwater	1,292
Staffordshire	1891	RG12_2752A	Mayfield	Calwich, Ellastone, Mayfield, Prestwood, Ramshorn, Stanton, Wootton	2,309
Staffordshire	1891	RG12_2754A	Calton	Alstonefield, Blore with Swinscoe, Calton, Ecton, Ilam, Milldale, Okeover, Stanshope, Waterfall, Wetton, Winkhill, Woodhouses	1,911
Warwickshire	1871	RG10_3109	St Peter	Birmingham	4,331

Wiltshire	1851	HO107_1840A	Trowbridge	Hilperton, Trowbridge (Staverton)	12,216
Wiltshire	1851	HO107_1841A	Bradford North Western	Great Bradford, (Bradford;South Wraxall; Winsley), Monkton Farleigh	9,457
Wiltshire	1851	HO107_1842	Bradley	North Bradley, (North Bradley; Southwick), Steeple Ashton (West Ashton)	2,666
Yorkshire East Riding	1871	RG10_4822A	Rillington	Duggleby, East Heslerton, Heslerton (West Heslerton; Yeddingham), Kirby Grindalythe, Knapton, North Grimston, Rillington, Scagglethorpe, Scampston, Settrington, Thorpe Bassett, Wintringham	4,149
Yorkshire North Riding	1861	RG9_3720A	Barnard Castle	Bowes, (Bowes; Gillmonby), Brignall, Forcett (Ovington), Hutton Magna, Rokeby, Romaldkirk (Lartington), Startforth (Egglestone Abbey; Startforth), Wycliffe	2,525
Yorkshire North Riding	1861	RG9_3721A	Middleton	Romaldkirk, (Cotherston; Holwick; Hunderthwaite; Laithkirk or Lune; Lunedale; Mickleton; Romald Kirk)	2,559
Yorkshire West Riding	1891	RG12_3700	West Leeds	Leeds	6,987

Table Notes

- If the piece number has a letter after it, then this suggests that the upload may only include some of the listed districts for the piece, but not necessarily all of them.

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.