

FreeCEN Newsletter – February 2026

Hello All

Welcome to the FreeCEN newsletter for February 2026, and 40 new pieces have been added to the website since the last edition, around 172,000 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.

Congratulations to the Merioneth team as the 1871 census for the county is now complete, and all pieces for the year now available on the website to search.

Contents

[Page 2 – Contribution Guidelines](#)

[Page 2 – Previous FreeCEN Newsletters](#)

[Page 2 – Volunteer for FreeCEN](#)

[Page 3 – News from Denise Colbert \(Q4 2025\)](#)

[Page 6 – Steering Committee Update – 15 December 2025](#)

[Page 8 – Steering Committee Update – 19 January 2026](#)

[Page 11 – FreeCEN Vacancies](#)

[Page 12 – Large Families](#)

[Page 13 – Places of Interest – Pontywal Mansion](#)

[Page 16 – Pieces Uploaded during January 2026](#)

[Page 22 – FreeCEN1](#)

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 (Q4 2025)

(Chief Operating Officer, Free UK Genealogy CIO)

Hello everyone,

As the year draws to a close, I wanted to share an update on what we've been working on during the final quarter of 2025. It's been a particularly full few months, bringing together a lot of the preparation and groundwork laid earlier in the year.

October began with our Strategy Weekend, which brought volunteers, trustees, and staff together both in Birmingham and online. The weekend gave us valuable time and space to reflect on where we are as an organisation, review progress against our pillars of Quality, Value, and Growth, and think carefully about what we want the coming years to look like. The discussions covered everything from project priorities and volunteer experience to culture, community, and how we work together across Free UK Genealogy. I very much enjoyed meeting some of our wonderfully dedicated volunteers and I'm so grateful to everyone who took part to help make it such a constructive and thoughtful event.

FreePRO (FreePROBATE) continued to move forward this quarter on several fronts. Earlier in the autumn, we were delighted to learn that FreePRO had been selected to receive £5,000 of Champion funding for the Big Give Christmas Challenge, following the successful completion of our £10,000 pledge target. During the campaign week itself (2–9 December), we reached 83% of our £30,000 target, and once Gift Aid is included we actually exceeded this! With thanks to all of our volunteers who contributed to this fantastic result: it's a real testament to the generosity and belief our community has in the project.

Alongside fundraising, technical and editorial work has continued steadily, helping prepare FreePRO for its next phase and future volunteer involvement. As FreePRO moves towards its pilot phase, we'll soon be looking for a small group of volunteers to help us test and shape how the project will work in practice. This will include working with samples of our probate data, helping refine workflows, and feeding back on tools and processes as we prepare for wider rollout. If this sounds like something you'd be interested in, please contact FreePRO.volunteers@freeukgenealogy.org.uk and let us know you'd like to be involved.

You're right to flag this, and I'm sorry I missed it.

Why it happened: when I rewrote the Q4 FreeBMD2 paragraph earlier, I leaned on the general "launch + stabilisation" storyline, but I didn't ground it in the FreeBMD2 comms materials and the post-launch discussions, where the blog post is explicitly part of the strategy and messaging (especially reassurance about FreeBMD1). That blog post is clearly important, both for user confidence and because it appears to have had a measurable impact on sustained engagement.

FreeBMD2 was officially released this quarter, and it took a huge amount of work to get it over the line and then support it properly once it was live. A significant focus since launch has been on addressing performance and speed, which were key concerns in the early feedback. I'm pleased to say that the site is now running much faster, and the improvements made over the quarter have had a noticeable impact on usability. Alongside this technical work, we published a blog post and wider launch communications to reassure users that FreeBMD1 remains available, while FreeBMD2 continues to be improved and developed. This messaging has been an important part of helping users understand that the new site is a step forward, built carefully and respectfully alongside the existing service. My thanks go to the volunteer developers and others who worked tirelessly on these improvements. At the same time, we've continued to think about the long-term sustainability of FreeBMD, including how we balance income generation with a good user experience, so the service remains free and viable for the future.

Across FreeREG and FreeCEN, volunteers have continued to add, review, and improve records throughout the quarter. Work has also continued behind the scenes on improving processes and tools, including ongoing development of FreeComETT, our new transcription tool for FreeREG. While progress here is gradual, the aim remains clear: to make transcription easier, more accessible, and better supported over time.

Much of this quarter has also been about looking ahead. Planning for future volunteer needs, including how we recruit and support volunteers for FreePRO, has begun, and we're starting to think about how ideas discussed at the Strategy Weekend can be turned into practical actions in 2026.

As we close out the year, I want to thank you all for the time, care, and commitment you bring to Free UK Genealogy. Whether you contribute records, support others, develop tools, or help shape our direction, your involvement makes everything we do possible. I'm looking forward to building on this work together in the year ahead.

With thanks for everything you do,
Denise Colbert
Chief Operating Officer
Free UK Genealogy CIO

Steering Committee Update – 15 December 2025

This update summarises the key points from the FreeCEN Steering Committee meeting held on 15 December 2025. It is intended to keep coordinators, transcribers and volunteers informed of progress, priorities and upcoming changes.

Key Highlights

- Progress has been made on shaping a clear set of FreeCEN Priorities and Risks to guide planning and targets for 2026.
- Positive discussions with The National Archives (TNA) about low-cost access to census images for transcription.
- Continued improvements to data quality through revalidation and cross-border corrections.
- Major technical upgrade planned, with coordinators involved in structured beta testing.
- Confirmation that UTF-8/diacritics support has been approved for FreeCEN.

Priorities & Strategic Planning

The Steering Committee reviewed draft versions of a new FreeCEN Priorities and Risks document. This document will help identify a small number of high-impact priorities and associated risks, and will directly inform target-setting and planning for 2026.

Image Sourcing & Recruitment

The Committee discussed new options for sourcing census images for transcription.

National Archives has indicated a possible cost of around 10p per black-and-white digital image, subject to confirmation of usage rights and ordering arrangements. If viable, this approach could help unlock stalled recruitment by ensuring images are available for new transcribers and coordinators. Further clarification is being sought from TNA.

Data Quality & Revalidation

Revalidation work continues to improve the accuracy of Place of Birth data and county assignments. A second revalidation pass is now underway and already showing benefits.

The Committee noted the importance of handling ambiguous place names carefully (e.g. multiple locations abbreviated as “Newton”) and confirmed that online validation tools should be used to prevent incorrect propagation.

Technical Updates

A major upgrade to the FreeCEN technical platform (Ruby, Rails and MongoDB) is planned for late December or early January. Some short, planned downtime may be required.

A small group of coordinators have volunteered to assist with beta testing, helping to ensure changes are stable before full release.

UTF8 adoption has now been formally approved, paving the way for improved handling of diacritics and non-English characters.

Legal & Policy Notes

Legal advice from Brodies confirms that images obtained via subscription services or CDs cannot be used for transcription where licence terms restrict use to personal research. This reinforces the need to identify alternative image sources, such as The National Archives.

Steering Committee Update – 19 January 2026

Key Decisions & Priorities for 2026

The Steering Committee agreed a focused set of priorities to guide FreeCEN work during 2026:

- Implement Place of Birth (POB) searching.
- Improve search functionality, including surname handling and character sets.
- Complete Scotland PARMS work to bring Scottish data to a consistent standard.
- Develop a realistic plan to recruit coordinators for long-vacant counties (by June 2026).
- Produce an IP and image-sourcing plan following recent legal advice (by Q1 2026).
- Increase the quantity of legally usable images available for transcription.

Coordinator Recruitment

Recruitment remains challenging. Three coordinator roles have been vacant for a long time: Sussex, Herefordshire and Nottinghamshire.

Experience shows that simply advertising vacancies is not effective. The Steering Committee will develop a structured recruitment plan, informed by coordinator feedback and lessons learned from FreeREG.

Coordinator Meeting – March 2026

A proposed coordinators' meeting will be held on:

Monday 9 March 2026

09:00 UK time

The meeting will focus on:

- Barriers to becoming or continuing as a coordinator.
- Image availability and priorities for transcription.
- What additional support coordinators need.

An invitation and short agenda will be circulated shortly.

Images, Licensing & Quality

Recent legal advice confirms that images from subscription services or certain CDs cannot be used for transcription where licence terms restrict use to personal research.

Discussions with The National Archives (TNA) indicate that purchasing large-scale image sets (from 1841 to 1911 at approximately £4.4m overall, £3.2m for 1911 images alone) may not be financially viable. FreeCEN will therefore prioritise:

- Identifying counties most in need of images.
- Increasing image quantity using legally permitted sources.
- Exploring whether AI-based image enhancement can improve readability of permitted images.

Technical & Data Quality Updates

- UTF-8 support has been approved, enabling better handling of diacritics and non-English characters.
- Revalidation work continues, including corrections to cross-border pieces and ambiguous place names.
- A major technical upgrade (Ruby, Rails and MongoDB) is planned, with beta testing involving volunteer coordinators once current blockers are resolved.

Embassy Records

Some National Archives records described as “census” (overseas/embassy material) are being investigated to determine whether they are suitable for inclusion in FreeCEN.

Next Steering Committee Meeting

Monday 16 February 2026, 09:00–10:00

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 six years fully transcribed. 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.

Large Families

(From Eileen Clark)

I have come across this entry whilst proofreading where we have Mr and Mrs Temblett in the 1911 Census living in Bridgwater, Somerset. They have had 20 children! Sadly 7 have died. The most I have previously seen is 18 – how many have you seen?

No one else must be included. (For order of entering names see Examples on back of Schedule.)		Ages of Males.	Ages of Females.	and upwards.	If less than one year write "under one."	Total Children Born Alive.	Children still Living.	Children who have Died.	Occupation, Profession, Trade, or Industry, or Service, to be clearly indicated. (See Instructions 1 to 5 and Examples on back of Schedule.)	Value of Property owned or occupied by the person.
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
1	George Temblett	Head	48	Married	29				Engine Fitter	200
2	Allie Temblett	Wife		47	Married	29	20	13	7	
3	May Temblett	daughter		23	Single				Machinist ^{Shank} Brown factory	250
4	Florence Temblett	daughter		22	Single				Machinist ^{Shank} collar factory	240
5	Beatrice Temblett	daughter		21	Single				Machinist ^{Shank} collar factory	
6	Viola Temblett	daughter		19	Single				Jornis ^{Shank} collar factory	230
7	Nellie Temblett	daughter		17	Single				Polisher ^{Shank} collar factory	230
8	Dorothy Temblett	daughter		15	Single				Brush girl	210
9	Ruby Temblett	daughter		11	Single				School	390
10	George Temblett	son	5						School	
11	Augusta Temblett	son	6						School	
12	Raymond Temblett	son	4 months							
13										
14										
15										

Editor's Note: To answer how many have I seen, the largest family in my own tree is that of Charles and Amey BOURN, 17 children of which 14 survived to adulthood. Amey (nee SMART) herself is one of 14 children and everyone of these married, and had children of their own.

Places of Interest – Pontywal Mansion

(From Chris Mahoney)

Whilst doing the validation of a Monmouth 1871 piece I came across several people whose place of birth had been transcribed as Pontywal Lodge with no county or other details listed which in turn led me to checking the scan to verify the transcription, and that led to a little more research as Pontywal was not a known place name in the gazetteer.

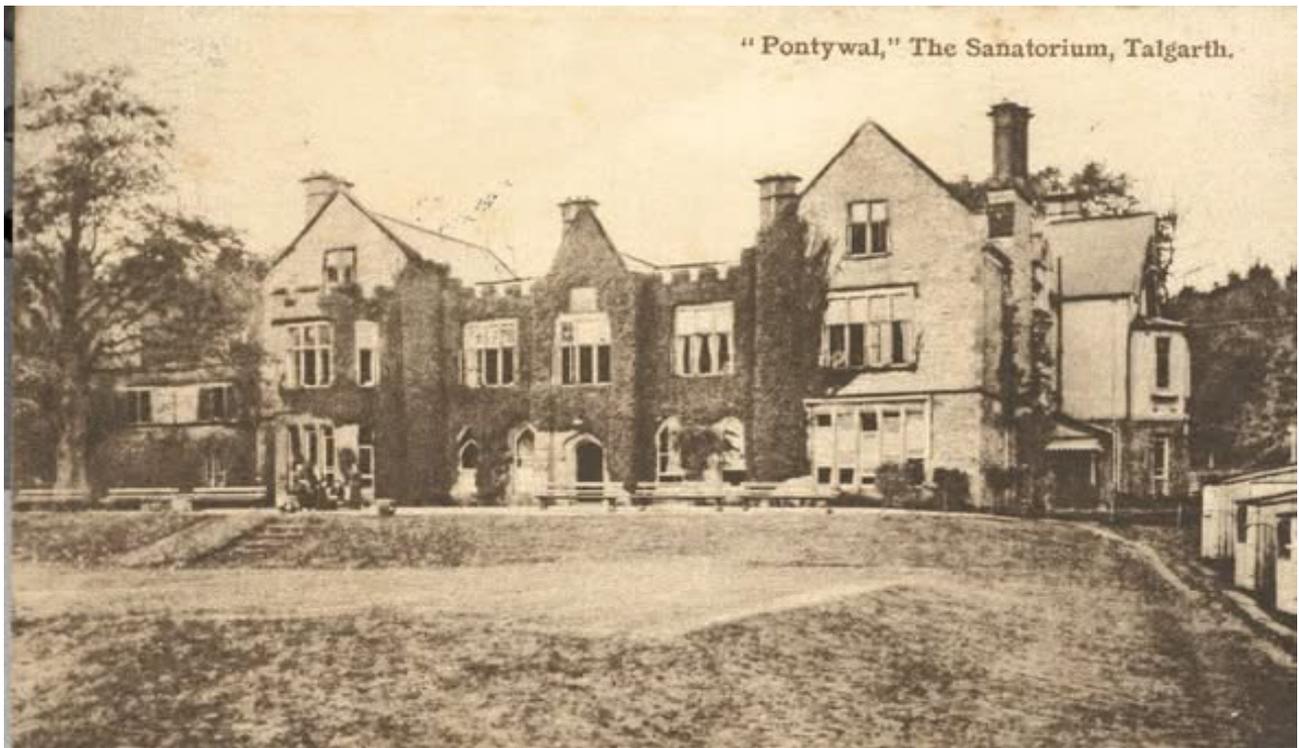
91	No 295	1	Thomas Prother	Head	Man	44	Laborer	Lambdon Camp	Painswick
			Mary Elizabeth Prother	Wife	Woman	40	Laborer's Wife	Gloucester	Gloucester
			Thomas Prother	Son	Man	14	Scholar	Tambled	Painswick
			John Prother	Son	Man	13	Scholar	Lambton	Painswick
			Elizabeth Prother	Daughter	Woman	10	Scholar	Bronllys	Pontywal Lodge
			Mary Ann Prother	Daughter	Woman	7	Scholar	Bronllys	Pontywal Lodge
			Elizabeth Prother	Daughter	Woman	5	Scholar	Talgarth	
			Margaret Prother	Daughter	Woman	3	Scholar	Monmouth	St. Dunstons

(Schedule with people born at Pontywal Lodge)

[Hughes Architects](#) has the following to say about Pontywal.

“Bronllys Hall was built in the mid 18th century and has served many purposes throughout its life. It has been known as Pontywal House and Mansion House and most recently served as the headquarters of a health board.

“Fire has played an important part in its evolution and the main house was rebuilt in the mid-19th century. Various high sheriffs of the county owned the property before it passed into the hands of the Welsh National Memorial Association in May 1913, when it became a tuberculosis hospital.”



(Postcard from the time that Pontywâl was used as a tuberculosis hospital)

A post from the Talgarth History Society has the following:

“The Pontywâl Mansion House in Bronllys was originally a large Estate House with vast gardens and grounds, and at one point was owned by the Crawshay family who owned the Iron Works in Merthyr Tydfil.”

Pontywâl, which is near the town of Bronllys in Breconshire was easily located on all census from 1861 through to 1891, but on each occasion a different family was in residence. The Crawshay family themselves on census nights for these years were found in Merthyr Tydfil, Glamorganshire where their Iron Works would have been.



(Pontywal as it is today)

Pieces Uploaded during January 2026

County	Year	Piece	Location	Civil Parishes	Number of Entries
Cambridgeshire	1841	HO107_68	Longstowe	Bourn, Caldecote, Caxton, Croxton, Eltisley, Gamlingay (Woodbury), Great Eversden, Hardwick, Hatley St George, Kingston, Little Eversden, Little Gransden, Longstowe, Toft	5,646
Cambridgeshire	1881	RG11_1667	St Andrew the Less	Cambridge, Cambridge St Andrew the Less	5,225
Cardiganshire	1871	RG10_5548	Llandyssil	Bangor, Henllan, Llandyssil, Llanfair Orllwyn, Llangunllo	2,754
Carmarthenshire	1861	RG9_4146A	Llanboidy	Cilymaenllwyd, (Cilymaenllwyd), Henllan Amgoed (Eglwysfair-achyrig), Llanglydwen	964
Durham	1891	RG12_4079	Staindrop	Cleatlam, Cockfield, Gainford, Headlam, Hilton, Ingleton, Langleydale with Shotton, Langton, Little Newsham, Morton Tinmouth, Raby with Keverstone, Staindrop, Walkerfield, Winston, Woodland	6,164

Essex	1861	RG9_1089	All Saints	Cold Norton, Hazeleigh, Latchingdon, Maldon All Saints, Mundon, North Fambridge, Purleigh, Snoreham, Stow Maries, Woodham Mortimer, Woodham Walter	4,780
Essex	1891	RG12_1096A	Sawbridgeworth	Great Hallingbury, Little Hallingbury	1,199
Glamorganshire	1871	RG10_5407	Aberdare	Aberdare	4,173
Gloucestershire	1861	RG9_1719	Bristol St Paul	Bristol St Paul In	5,707
Hampshire	1841	HO107_381C	Selborne	Empshott, Farringdon	695
Hampshire	1841	HO107_398A	Christchurch	Sopley, (Avon; Ripley; Shirley;)	917
Lancashire	1861	RG9_2719	Everton	Walton on the Hill, (Everton)	4,874
Lancashire	1891	RG12_3145	Radcliffe	Ainsworth, Congreave Fold, Elton, Radcliffe	4,295
Lancashire	1891	RG12_3216	Greengate	Salford	7,760
Leicestershire	1851	HO107_2102AA	Denton	Croxton Kerrial, Knipton	1,007

Lincolnshire	1851	HO107_2102	Colsterworth	Bassingthorpe, (Westby), Bitchfield, Boothby Pagnell, Braceby, Burton Coggles, Colsterworth (Colsterworth with Woolsthorpe; Twyford), Gunby St Nicholas, Haceby, Ingoldsby (Scotland), Lenton (Keisby; Lavington or Lenton with Hanby; Osgodby), North Witham (North Witham with Lobthorp), Pickworth, Ropsley (Little Humby; Ropsley), Sapperton, Somerby (Great Humby), South Witham, Stainby	6,252
Lincolnshire	1851	HO107_2102A	Denton	Belvoir, Bottesford (Easthorpe), Denton, Great Ponton, Harlaxton, Harston, Little Ponton, Muston, Normanton, Redmile, Skillington, South Stoke (Easton; North Stoke), Stroxton, Woolsthorpe, Wyville with Hungerton	6,454
Lincolnshire	1851	HO107_2116	Brigg	Barnetby le Wold, Broughton (Castlethorpe; Gokewell; Manby), Cadney cum Housham, Croxton, Elsham, Hibaldstow, Kirmington, Kirton in Lindsey, Manton (Cleatham; Manton; Twigmore), Melton Ross, Newstead, Redbourne, Scawby cum Sturton, Worlaby, Wrawby (Glanford Brigg; Wrawby)	5,888
Monmouthshire	1891	RG12_4351	Aberystroth	Aberystroth, Ebbw Vale	6,494

Monmouthshire	1891	RG12_4363	Pontypool	Garndiffaith, Trevethin with Pontypool, Varteg	7,357
Montgomeryshire	1891	RG12_4587	Towyn	Brynglas, Llanwrin, Trefrydd	624
Moray	1841	HS4_143	Speymouth		1,772
Northumberland	1851	HO107_2412	Earsdon	Earsdon, (Backworth;Burradon or Brierdean; Earsdon; Hartley with Seaton Sluice and Rocky Island; Holywell; Seaton Delaval; Seghill or Sedgehill)	8,441
Nottinghamshire	1911	RG14_20700	Kneesall	Clipstone, Edwinstowe	647
Pembrokeshire	1861	RG9_4146	Llanboidy	Llanboidy, Llanfallteg, Mynachlog Ddu	2,227
Somerset	1901	RG13_2282	Middlezoy	Bussex, Liney, Lyng, Middlezoy, North Petheron, Othery, Thorngrove, Townsend, West Lyng, Weston Zoyland	2,088
Somerset	1911	RG14_14280	Bridgwater	Bridgwater	1,649
Suffolk	1841	HO107_1025	Hoxne	Athelington, Badingham, Bedfield, Bedingfield, Brundish, Carlton, Denham, Dennington, Fressingfield, Horham, Hoxne, Kelsale, Laxfield	9,190
Surrey	1891	RG12_579	Reigate	Betchworth, Redhill, Reigate Borough, Reigate Foreign	7,171
Warwickshire	1861	RG9_2226	Warwick	Guys Cliffe, Warwick St Nicholas	4,828

Wiltshire	1851	HO107_1844A	Pewsey	Burbage, Collingbourne Ducis, Collingbourne Kingston (Aughton; Brunton; Kingston; Southton or Vallance), Easton, Everleigh, Milton Lilbourne (Clinch), Pewsey, Wootton Rivers	6,851
Wiltshire	1851	HO107_1845	Orcheston	Maddington, Orcheston St George (Elston), Orcheston St Mary, Rolleston, Shrewton, Tilshead, Winterbourne Stoke	2,430
Wiltshire	1851	HO107_1845A	Amesbury	Amesbury, (Little or West Amesbury), Bulford, Durnford (Little Durnford; Netton; Newtown; Salterton), Durrington, Figheldean (Ablington), Milston (Brigmerston), Wilsford (Lake), Woodford (Upper, Middle and Lower Woodford)	3,906
Wiltshire	1851	HO107_1845B	Winterbourne	Allington, Boscombe, Idmiston (Fort; Gomeldon; Idmiston; Porton; Shrippl), Newton Tony, West Cholderton, Winterbourne Dauntsey, Winterbourne Earls, Winterbourne Gunner	1,925
Wiltshire	1851	HO107_1847	Salisbury	St Edmund, St Martin, St Thomas	9,141

Worcestershire	1841	HO107_1197A	Halfshire (Lower Division)	Elmley Lovett, Frankley, Hagley (Wassel), Halesowen (Cradley; Lutley; Warley-Wigorn), Hartlebury (Upper Mitton), Kidderminster (Blackstone; Blackdown; Commerton or Comberton; Dunclent; Eyemore; Franche; Habberley; Hircott-Lickhill; Hoarstone; Kidderminster Foreign; Lower Mitton or Stourport; Netherton; Puxton; Trimpley; Wannerton; Wribbenhall)	9,625
Worcestershire	1861	RG9_2105	Pershore	Fladbury, (Fladbury; Hill and Moor), Pershore Holy Cross (Holy Cross Pershore; Wadborough; Walcot-cum-Membris), Pirton	3,588
Yorkshire North Riding	1871	RG10_4889A	Yarm	Middlesbrough	3,418
Yorkshire North Riding	1871	RG10_4890A	Yarm	Middlesbrough	4,437
Yorkshire North Riding	1891	RG12_4079A	Staindrop	Barforth	121

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.