



FreeBMD – Past, Present and Future

Graham Hart - Trustee
15th September 2018

Free UK Genealogy 2018 Meeting – TNA, Kew



Who am I ?

- Graham Hart – Trustee of FreeBMD

Agenda

- Past
 - How it all started
 - Steps along the way
- Present
 - Where are we now
- Future
 - Where are we going

What is Free UK Genealogy ?

- Parent charity for 3 projects
 - FreeBMD
 - FreeREG
 - FreeCEN

What is FreeBMD ?

- The trustees shall hold the trust fund and its income for the general benefit of the public by:
- a) Subject to the consent of the Registrar General for England and Wales, the provision of an electronic database and associated digitised images of information held in the Indexes of Births, Marriages and Deaths held by the General Register Office of England and Wales;
- b) Subject to the consent of the relevant authority, the provision of similar databases of information and associated digitised images of other records of genealogical significance (including, but not restricted to, Parish Registers, Census Records, Electoral Registers, Directories and Wills).

How did we start it ?

- International Internet Genealogical Society (IIGS)
 - Formed by Dr Brian Leverich, founder/owner of rootsweb
- What could be achieved if the online genealogists worked together
 - Thousands of potential volunteers

What should we transcribe ?

- Global
- Source availability
- Interest
- Useful
- GRO Birth, Marriage and Death Registers
 - St Catherine's house
 - Fiche available in libraries

Initial thoughts

- Transcribers research as normal
- When they find a record, they transcribe 10 either side of it
- Different transcriber types
 - Casual
 - Medium
 - Intense
- It was possible ! But would take a long time.
- Insane

Project startup

- We requested permission from the ONS
 - Finally received a response on the 18th May 1998 and then a final agreement on the 13 July 1998 with permission to transcribe subject to conditions.

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Mr B Laurie
17 Perryn Road
LONDON
W3 7LR

Our Ref: ARC 77/4
Your Ref: *

13 July 1998

Dear Mr Laurie

Further to my letter dated 18 May I am pleased to at last be able to grant you permission to publish GRO Index data over 100 years old on the internet.

This is subject to:

- only publishing entries relating to records over 100 years old
- access to the information being provided free of charge
- inclusion of an acknowledgement "© Crown copyright. Published by permission of the Controller of HMSO and the Office for National Statistics"
- inclusion of an instruction to end users to say that they must not then copy on, transfer or reproduce records without the prior permission of ONS.

It may also be wise to include a disclaimer about the accuracy and completeness of the indexes which are both very poor in the earlier indexes.

If you are prepared to be bound by these conditions please write to me stating this.

It should be noted that ONS permission must be sought for copyright under any other condition or for any other ONS or GRO data.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "E Wilson".

E WILSON

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Project startup

- We requested permission from the ONS
 - Finally received it for records up to 100 years old.
- Hundred things to think about
 - Programming
 - Formats
 - Source
 - Project structure

Some of the steps

- Website hosting provided by Rootsweb
- Programming by Ben and I
- Organisation by Camilla
- Fiche, Fiche printer
- Mailing lists
- And, perhaps, most importantly
- Transcribers and Co-ordinators !

Two rules

- Control lies with the trustees
- Type what you see

Structure - FreeBMD

- Syndicates
 - Transcribers
 - Control and track their allocations
- Syndicate co-ordinator
 - Track year allocation
 - Deal with Co-ordinators questions
- District alias team
- Quality co-ordinator

Structure – Tech

- Programming
- Web developers
- SpeedBMD
- WinBMD
- MacBMD
- linBMD
- BMDVerify

Project costs

- Sponsorship
 - Rootsweb
 - Ancestry
 - No sponsorship now
- Advertising
 - Initially ancestry
 - Now various adverts

Source

1. Initially 'find your own'
 2. Fiche / Printed copies
 3. Scans of Film
 4. Permission to show images finally granted
 5. Donations of film copies.
- A copy of all images are now up on the site
 - ALL transcriptions are performed using filmed scans

Source – Why not OCR ?

- For typed entries 90% is considered good by OCR
- That would give us approximately one error in every two records
- For Handwritten entries, the accuracy is much worse.

Quality Assurance

- Double Keying
 - By separate syndicates
 - Ideally with separate source
- System compares sequences of entries
 - Code based on Human Genome project
- Results indicate status of record

Timeline of project

- 1998
 - 13th July - Permission received from the ONS
 - July - Dec - Development of website / processes / code
 - 18th Sep - FreeBMD-Admins list created
 - 30th Sep - Formal announcement and call for volunteers
 - Dec - Dedicated server from Rootsweb
 - LIVE as freebmd.rootsweb.com

- 1999
 - Dave Mayall joined us as an owner
 - Jan - New Logo
 - Jan - District Aliases added
 - Feb - 90,000 entries
 - Mar
 - 100,000
 - Letter from the ONS giving formal instructions for owners of GRO indexes to get permission to copy the source for transcribing.
 - Apr - Syndicate management utilities. Syndicate mailing list
 - May - Formally starting to accept transcribers
 - Sep - 300,000
 - Nov - SpeedBMD launched

- 2000
 - Feb - 1,000,000 entries
 - May - 2,000,000 entries
 - A quarter of a million entries per month
 - Sep - 3,000,000 entries
- 2001
 - Jan
 - 5,000,000 entries
 - 720,000 entries per month
 - Ancestry purchased a complete set of films for years 1837 to 1900
 - May 10,000,000 entries - 2 million per month !
 - July
 - Ian Brooke launches WinBMD
 - David Lang launches BMDVerify
 - November
 - 21,000,000 entries
 - 3,000 transcribers

- 2002
 - March
 - 3 new servers for FreeBMD
- 2003
 - Charity Formed
 - Permission from ONS to include all records, removing the 100 year rule
 - District alias team working with 1000 new district spellings every month
 - Quality control reports - Suspect Files and Duplicate Files launched
 - FreeBMD starts to purchase films from the ONS
 - Archive CD Books (Rod Neep) agree to scan our films for free.
 - 71,000,000 records, 2.7 million per month, around 6,000 transcribers
 - 2 new servers dedicated to holding the scans
- 2004
 - Scan / Image viewing utilities written
 - 100 million records reached in August

- 2005
 - 100 million unique records in May
 - FreeCEN and FreeREG join up with FreeBMD and become part of the Charity
- 2006
 - Postem facility added
 - 123 Million records
- 2007
 - System entries added
 - 1 million files uploaded to FreeBMD
 - SOG award the Prince Michael of Kent Award to FreeBMD
 - Distinguished and outstanding services to genealogy
 - It had only been awarded 3 times previously. FRC, ABM Publishing, and Genealogical Society of Utah
 - Marriages after 1912 now searchable by spouse
 - 135 million records

- 2008
 - Servers moved to new datacenter. Site stayed up throughout the move.
 - 9 production servers and 4 image servers
 - Correction requests coming in at 5,000 per month. Kevin Howells (RIP) handled about half of them himself, the other half handled by syndicate co-ordinators and transcribers.
 - Hit 280,000 searches in one day
 - 200 Million records !!
- 2009
 - 2 new image servers replacing 2 old ones
 - Allan Raymond appointed Trustee
 -
- 2010 Nick Barratt Executive director

- 2012 - Jim Killock appointed Trustee
- 2013 - Darren Wright appointed Executive Director
- 2014
 - Allan Raymond resigned as a trustee
 - Stayed with the project in his various co-ordinator roles
- 2015
 - Richard Light Appointed as a Trustee
 - Dr. Pat Reynolds appointed Executive Director
 - Automatic corrections system
- 2016
- 2017 - Georgio Abraini appointed Trustee
- 2018 - Andrew Turvey and Alexandra Eveleigh appointed Trustees
 - Present day !

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Present



Structure - FreeUK Genealogy

- Trustees
 - Camilla Gemmingen von Massenbach
 - Ben Laurie
 - Graham Hart
 - David Mayall
 - Graham Hart
 - Jim Killock
 - Richard Light
 - Georgio Abraini
 - Andrew Turvey
 - Alexandra Eveleigh

Structure - FreeUK Genealogy

- Support Team
 - Pat Reynolds - Executive Director
 - Denise Colbert – Engagement Co-ordinator
 - Helen Vince – Finance Assistant
 - Lemon – System Administrator
 - Helen Bainbridge– Scanning
 - Rich Pomfret – Technical project manager
 - Vino Subhu - Developer

Structure FreeUK Genealogy

- Support Team
 - Development group
 - FreeBMD Team
 - FreeREG Team
 - FreeCEN Team

How far are we now ?

- Aug 2018 update
 - 269,308,681 distinct records
 - 345,335,460 total records
- Transcription rate
 - 600,000 per month
- Searches on Friday 14th September
 - 131,393

Future

- Complete FreeBMD
 - 1st transcription - 2019
 - 2nd transcription – In the future !
 - 75 million double keyed so far
 - 269 million records in total
- FreeBMD2
 - New website
 - Survey
 - <https://www.freeukgenealogy.org.uk/news/2018/09/13/refreshing-freebmd/>

Future

- Open Data
- Society of Genealogists
 - Show FreeBMD, FreeREG, and FreeCEN on their website.
- Upcoming projects
 - FreeProbate
 - FreePASTPlace
- Access to the mother's maiden name and age at death data from the GRO search for FreeBMD

Free UK Genealogy future

- Continue to transcribe until complete
- Continue to push for full availability and transcription of the original records.
- Continue to support free access to records.