

THE LIMPSFIELD PAPERS CORRESPONDENCE WITH FLORIDA

Dr Graham Dixon

THE LIMPSFIELD PAPERS: CORRESPONDENCE WITH FLORIDA

In the Spring 2025 edition of the *Delius Society Journal*, an article entitled 'The Limpsfield Papers' described the discovery in the St Peter's Limpsfield Church Office of material relating to Delius's reinterment in the churchyard. The present article presents a sequel to the events of 1935, which marked the burials of both Frederick and his wife Jelka. Material relating to Frederick's burial proved so voluminous that extending the previous article to encompass the supplementary correspondence between Limpsfield and Florida in the 1940s would have taken the focus away from the reburial itself. Further material preserved in the Church Office forms the basis of the present article.¹

In 2002, Jeff Driggers described in the *Delius Society Journal* the warm transatlantic relationships that resulted from the Delius connection.² These supplementary Limpsfield Papers cast some extra light on the cordial relationship which evolved between Delius devotees in Florida and the parish of Limpsfield. The Limpsfield Papers relating to Florida complement the seven letters now preserved in the Jacksonville Public Library.³

Readers of this Journal will not need to be reminded that for about eighteen months from March 1884, Delius was responsible for a plantation of citrus fruits in Florida. The responsibility was borne extremely lightly and much of Delius's time was spent learning the rudiments of music theory with Thomas F Ward, a highly accomplished local organist whom Delius had the good fortune to encounter in Jacksonville.⁴ Delius claimed that he had learnt more from him than any other teacher. While there, Delius also struck up a friendship with Jutta Bell, a singer of Norwegian origin, who introduced him to the music of Grieg, who was to play a crucial role supporting Delius's development as a composer. In two ways, therefore, the brief time in the United States was to prove decisive for the composer's future career path.

When Delius left Solana Grove in 1885 that could well have marked the end of the story for Florida. Delius had no interest in growing fruit, and it was only by pure chance that Florida offered him the opportunity of acquiring the rudiments of a musical education. Apart from one brief

return visit in 1897, possibly to seek a child he may have fathered, Delius seems largely to have forgotten about Florida. Florida, however, rediscovered him some decades later. Sometime in the 1930s, Martha Richmond, a prominent figure in Jacksonville musical life, was captivated by hearing Delius's music on the radio, and learned that the composer had spent time at Solana Grove, which was not far from her own home.⁵ In May 1939 she located the house in which Delius had lived, and – concerned about its poor condition and vulnerability to vandalism – she purchased the land on which it stood. Eventually, the modest house was relocated to the university campus in Jacksonville.⁶

Saving the built heritage was not sufficient for Mrs Richmond. Within the context of the existing Ladies' Friday Musicale, she planned a series of Delius Memorial Concerts. These started in the mid-1940s and the series ran yearly until the early 1950s. From then on, the concerts were planned more sporadically until 1961, the year in which a Delius Festival was first organized.⁷ The precise dates of any concert activity have been debated. However, the music of Delius definitely spawned considerable interest in Florida and a group of people, centred on the Ladies' Friday Musicale, were instrumental in promoting it, chief among whom was Mrs Richmond.

The earliest two letters in the transatlantic correspondence are preserved in Jacksonville and date from late April and early May 1946. They concern a visit to England undertaken by William Prentice, an antiques dealer from St Augustine, Florida. Writing to Martha Richmond while heading to the UK on board the SS Washington, he noted that he was 'thinking about Limpsfield'. There is no evidence that Prentice was especially interested in Delius himself. Mrs Richmond may well have been a customer of his antiques business, and it would appear that his Limpsfield visit was made at her request. His subsequent letter, written on 11th May, gives a detailed description of Limpsfield Church and the Delius grave, as well as describing a pleasant hour in the company of the Rector, the Rev Charles Steer. On the same day, the Rector wrote a long letter to Mrs Richmond, furnishing his personal recollections of the 1935 reinterment ceremony and, strangely, recounting Eric Fenby's misgivings about the whole event. While we should not attribute any purely mercenary motivation to this informative letter, the Rector noted towards the end that no-one had tended Delius's grave since the Harrisons had left Limpsfield, and that a group of Trustees was responsible for raising funds to maintain

the churchyard. Prentice, he noted, had donated £1 for upkeep of the Delius grave. The following day, Mrs Livesay, Secretary of the Churchyard Committee, wrote to Prentice thanking him for his donation.⁸ Hearing of this, Mrs Richmond was moved to contribute as well, and when the Limpsfield Rector wrote on 11th July he thanked her for her donation of £6 for the maintenance of the grave. All the documents mentioned so far are held by the Jacksonville Public Library.⁹

The other side of this correspondence, reinforcing the connection between Florida and Limpsfield, has now come to light in the Church Office. A chart showing the chronology of the correspondence might be helpful and is shown on the next page.

A letter from the Limpsfield collection gives an interesting glimpse behind-the-scenes. On the basis that Mrs Richmond had considerable financial resources in comparison with most English residents, the Rector had clearly consulted one of his parishioners, Helen Tompson, about making some appeal for funds. This took place before Steer wrote the 11th July letter. Miss Tompson did not have much to suggest in terms of a plan, but she did endorse the approach that the Rector proposed, namely, sending a photo together with news of the establishment of a fund to endow the grave:

Cranford
Limpsfield

Dear Mr. Steer,

Thank you for sending the enclosure: I'm afraid I've kept it rather long.

I was hoping I might have a suggestion to make – but alas my mind remains blank.

As you say a good photograph + a letter to say that we hope a fund will be raised to endow the grave – is the best idea I think.

Yrs sincerely

Helen Tompson

7/7/46

Date	From	To	Where written	Content	Location
29th April 1946	Mr Prentice	Mrs Richmond	SS Washington	Life on ship	Jacksonville Public Library
11th May 1946	Mr Prentice	Mrs Richmond	Tunbridge Wells	Visit to Limpstield	Jacksonville Public Library
11th May 1946	Rev Steer	Mrs Richmond	Limpstield	Prentice visit	Jacksonville Public Library
12th May 1946	Mrs Livesay	Mrs Richmond	Limpstield	Thank you	Jacksonville Public Library
7th July 1946	Helen Tompson	Rev Steer	Limpstield	Appeal for funds	Limpstield
11th July 1946	Rev Steer	Mrs Richmond	Limpstield	Photo/Funding	Jacksonville Public Library
18th July 1946	Beatrice Harrison	Mrs Richmond	Limpstield	Burial/Funding	Jacksonville Public Library
July/August 1946	Mrs Richmond	Rev Steer	?Jacksonville	Thanks/Wishes	Limpstield
3rd August 1946	Mr Prentice	Rev Steer	St Augustine	Thanks/Voyage	Limpstield
11th July 1947	Mrs Richmond	Rev Steer	Jacksonville	Parcels/Weather	Limpstield
10th August 1947	Mrs Richmond	Rev Steer	Jacksonville	Parcels/Wishes	Limpstield

Four days after Tompson's letter was written, the Rector indeed sent his request, along with a high-quality photo of the grave, which he had commissioned at some considerable expense. The four prints of Delius's grave cost eight shillings, about £14 in today's currency.¹⁰ As agreed with Miss Tompson, the Rector took the opportunity to introduce the subject of donations, clearly hoping to take advantage of the disparity in wealth between the USA and England in the post-war period. He noted his intention to have the grave 'endowed' in perpetuity, adding that no-one had come forward to take this responsibility. As for the church, it was 'impossible ... to take charge of individual graves unless we are definitely commissioned to do so'. We know that Mrs Richmond was pleased with the enclosed photograph from the final page of her response to the Rector. Unfortunately, the other pages of this letter do not seem to have survived. Here is that final page, written either in July or the very first days of August, after the photograph had arrived:

the photograph. I hope to be in St. Augustine next week and I will take it to show to him and Mrs. Prentice.

Please accept my thanks for your kindness and trouble in securing such a fine photograph for us. It will be seen with interest in Jacksonville and preserved in our permanent records.

With all good wishes for St. Peter's Church and Limpsfield Parish,

Very sincerely

Martha B. Richmond

(Mrs. Henry L. Richmond)

It is frustrating that the previous page or pages are no longer available. Since Mrs Richmond normally wrote on two sides of the paper, this was probably quite an extended letter, at least three pages.

The Rector's July letter does seem to have formed part of a concerted campaign, since another letter in the Jacksonville Public Library collection, written by Beatrice Harrison, a week later, takes up the same theme.¹¹ Sweetening the pill with extensive details about the close relationship between her family and Delius, she concludes with a direct appeal to Mrs Jackson and other Floridian Delius devotees, mentioning for the first time a specific amount. Harrison states that if they 'could raise £30, it would

permanently keep the grave beautiful'. The exact sum could presumably only have been established in discussion with the Rector himself. Writing in her usual rather gushing style, Beatrice includes the emotive appeal:

Please dear Mrs. Richmond, will you do this? Know how touched he [Delius] would be and I ask you to do this with my whole heart.

In today's money, the sum requested would have been about £1500, a large amount for a single grave, but not an enormous donation for people of means, either in England or Florida.¹²

It might be noted in passing that Beatrice's letter contains several inaccuracies. For instance, Beatrice and May had met Delius for the first time in Manchester, not Leeds.¹³ In early 1921 the Deliuses stayed with the Harrison family in their previous residence at Thames Ditton, but never visited Limpsfield as Beatrice claimed.¹⁴ While Felix Aprahamian recalls Limpsfield as a rural idyll with wonderful birdsong¹⁵ and a *Daily Telegraph* correspondent reports a cuckoo singing on the day of the reinterment,¹⁶ Beatrice's recollection of the cuckoo calling as the orchestra finished playing *On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring* seems almost too perfect in its timing. Her claim that a thousand people attended the funeral is clearly hyperbole. Limpsfield church cannot hold more than 200 people, particularly once the orchestra was in place, though some may have remained in the churchyard. All these embellishments, conscious or unwitting, serve to emphasise Beatrice's strong feelings about the relationship the Harrisons and Deliuses enjoyed, the unique genius loci of Limpsfield, and the veneration in which Delius was widely held.

Given the timing, the first pages of Mrs Richmond's incomplete letter may well have included her response to appeals for Florida's music lovers to fund the maintenance of the grave.¹⁷ It seems clear that Mrs Richmond did in the event show considerable generosity. A note from the Secretary of the Churchyard Committee, quoted in the *Limpsfield Parish Magazine* for October 1946, shows that the appeal was successful and suggests that a single person, presumably Mrs Richmond herself, contributed the entire sum of £30. Indeed, it might well be her lost letter which is quoted in the *Parish Magazine* – perhaps the relevant page or pages were passed to the magazine editor and never recovered:

THE CHURCHYARD

Lovers of the music of Frederick Delius will be interested to learn that his grave in Limpsfield Churchyard has now been permanently endowed for upkeep. An American gentleman, on a visit to England, came here specially to see the grave. He took with him a very lovely mental picture of the spot. This so touched the heart of a lady in Florida that she has sent in a cheque for the endowment of the grave. In her acknowledgment of the photograph we had taken for her she writes: "I feel it a privilege to be the means of providing perpetual care for the grave of Frederick Delius, the great composer, who gave so much to the world: my State of Florida should honour his memory always. I am grateful for the fine photograph; it has been seen by many music lovers in Jacksonville, and is now a part of the Delius memorial collection at our Jacksonville Public Library."

Copies of the photograph can be obtained from Mr. Hordle or myself for 6d.

This brings me to mention All Souls' Day, the time when we remember by name at the Holy Communion those we love, but see no longer. It is the best way we know of keeping touch with them. Services at 8 and 10.30 a.m. that day.

The souls of the righteous are in the hands of God.

L. R. LIVESAY.

Interestingly, we find that copies of the photo were now being offered to the congregation for a far more reasonable price. This indicates that the prints sent to Florida were of superior quality, designed to impress.

We now turn to the other documents preserved in the Church Office. First among these is a thank-you letter from Prentice, acknowledging the receipt of the photo from the Rector, and informing him that Mrs Richmond had also received her own copy. As well as expressing his intention to call on a future visit, he gives some detail of his journey home to Florida (letter on next page).

Though the rather direct request for funds to maintain the grave discussed above might have seemed rather forward, even intrusive, it is gratifying to record that what might have looked like a rather transactional relationship did transform into a warm friendship. Indeed, Prentice's letter refers to the Anglo-American Loan Agreement of 1946, which was

148 Bay St.
St Augustine
Florida

Aug 3. 46

Rev. C. Steer
Limpsfield Surrey.

My dear Sir,

Your letter received with photo enclosed for which please accept my thanks.

I have heard from Mrs Richmond that she received a photo also.

She was very pleased and hopes some day in the future to call on you. Needless to say I hope to do that same thing whenever I am in England again[.] I gave you a lot of work in connection with Frederick Delius and appreciate very much all you have done.

I left London on a freighter (12 passengers) Seventeen days London to New York. Quite a trip but the best offered, and I was glad to get it. When I got on the train in New York for Florida I really relaxed and had for company on the train a very lovely young couple from San [sic] Domingo W. Indies, so that the wind up of my trip was very pleasant.

Arrived home and found everything alright. I expect to see Mrs Richmond in a few days when we will have much to talk about. She was deeply interested in my description of St Peters Church. I hope this finds you well and happy now the loan has gone over. With best wishes and again many thanks.

Believe me

Sin[cerely] yours,

William F. Prentice

negotiated after World War II to help the British economy recover. Significantly, Mrs Richmond's letter of August 1947 underlined the considerable contrast between the standard of living in the United States and in England during this period. It emerges that Mrs Richmond had been supporting the Rector and his family materially. She expresses delight that the food parcels she had sent were so much appreciated and states her firm

intention to dispatch further consignments. Apart from those hardships, she mentions the stifling summer weather in Florida. Though Mrs Richmond speaks in the letter below of sharing her memories of England with the Prentices, Driggers noted that she never actually visited Limpsfield, Bradford, or indeed Grez-sur-Loing. Mrs Richmond, who was born in 1884 in Atkinson County, Georgia, was over 60 at the time of this correspondence. Her European travels had taken place long before she became interested in Delius. On this and other Delius matters, Driggers is a reliable witness, since he worked at the Jacksonville Public Library for decades, taking responsibility for their Delius Collection, some of whose items had come from Mrs Richmond herself.¹⁸

2565 St. Johns Avenue
Jacksonville 4, Florida
August 10, 1947

My dear Mr. Steer:

Your letter of July 9 is deeply appreciated. I can imagine how little time there is for writing for anyone as busy with many duties as you. The glimpse of Limpsfield is very welcome. I have had such nice letters from Mrs. Livesay and Miss Harrison, too, and shall write to them with pleasure.

I cannot tell you how pleased I am that the food parcels were useful and that they arrived safely, in good condition. We remember well our own pleasure here in extra bits of food during our rationing. I am sending parcels again to you, Mrs. Livesay and Miss Harrison, this time through Overseas Associates, Inc., as there may be some variety in the content of parcels of the different firms.

I hope these, too, will be useful, to tide over the time until Britain's supplies are plentiful again. Many thanks to you for conveying the parcels to Mrs. Livesay and Miss Harrison. This time I am sending the parcels directly to them.

I hope you and your family and Limpsfield will have a happy summer, with perfect weather to last for a long time now. I saw Mr. and Mrs. Prentice recently in St. Augustine. They are well and busy and I do not think Mr. Prentice plans another English visit this year. We talked of England of which we have happy memories. I am sure they would wish

to join me in sending kind regards to you and your family. We hope Mrs. Livesay is quite well soon.

We are now in the midst of our very long, hot summer and think with longing of the cool weather of next October.

With many thanks again for your kind letter,

Sincerely yours,

Martha B. Richmond

Three months later, Mrs Richmond wrote again to Steer. In the meantime, it appears, he had sent a further letter to her, telling her about the beautiful Limpsfield summer and thanking her for dispatching more food parcels. Most of Mrs Richmond's response concerns the Florida weather. Given how close Mrs Richmond was living to the immense St Johns River, it is no surprise that she was concerned about tides and flooding.

2565 ST. JOHNS AVENUE
JACKSONVILLE 4, FLORIDA

November 7 - 1947

My dear Mr. Steer:

We were most fortunate in escaping serious hurricane damage, but we have had some busy and uncomfortable weeks of torrential rains, much debris, and much mildew in houses and possessions. Our worst damage was from very high ocean tides and in our St. John's River, as we are only 18 miles from the ocean, and flooding of streets and gardens.

All is calm again, as always after Nature's rages. We could realize what your floods in Britain last year must have meant, though yours were more severe. It is good to hear of your beautiful summer. I earnestly pray that the coming winter everywhere will be mild enough to compensate for last year, especially with you in Britain.

The sending of the food parcels is such a small thing. Your letters give me real happiness in knowing that the parcels are useful and help, even a little in varying a monotonous diet. We remember as well our own days of rationing.

I am sure the church yard is beautiful. I look often at the picture of the Delius grave and feel, for the moment, as if I had been in Limpsfield. We value the picture more than I can tell you.

Your two letters are greatly appreciated, for I know that you cannot have a great deal of time for letter writing. Mrs. Livesay and Miss Harrison have written, too, and I had much pleasure from their letters.

I hope you and Mrs. Steer and your family will have a good winter of health and renewed strength.

With all good wishes

Very sincerely

Martha B. Richmond

Perhaps there was further correspondence between Mrs Richmond and the Rector. After all, the tone is extremely cordial. Mrs Richmond passed away in 1968 and was buried in Savannah, Georgia, the state where she was born. The Rector was laid to rest in Limpsfield churchyard in 1958, having retired from the parish eight years earlier. If they had continued to write, any letters would surely have been purely personal in nature, not concerned either with Delius or the church and for this reason they were never archived with the material from the late 1940s.

After his brief return visit in 1897, Delius never visited Florida again, though his time there had lasting significance for him. The music instruction he received from the talented organist, Thomas F Ward of Jacksonville, was the only tuition Delius considered relevant to his development as a composer. And there was a further musical legacy, the singing of the African-American farm workers. Delius considered that they 'showed a truly wonderful sense of musicianship and harmonic resource in the instinctive way that they treated a melody'. Inspired by this, Delius confided to Fenby, 'I first felt the urge to express myself in music'.¹⁹ That musical spark was to lead him on a long journey, from Florida to Leipzig, Paris, and, together with Jelka, Grez-sur-Loing and Norway. Finally, through his connection with the musical Harrison sisters, the circuitous journey brought him to repose in Limpsfield, somewhere he had never actually visited. The correspondence between the Rector of Limpsfield and Delius's Floridian admirers seems somehow to complete the circle, connecting the place where he first felt the impulse to compose with the village where he was finally laid to rest, in the presence of many who had

come to admire his musical achievement. Despite the misgivings of some in the Delius circle, Frederick and Jelka rest in the Limpsfield churchyard, close to their great friends, the Harrison sisters and the composer's most loyal champion, Sir Thomas Beecham.

Graham Dixon

¹ Once again, I wish to record my gratitude to the Rector of Limpsfield, the Rev Helen Cook and the Parochial Church Council for their support in permitting me to study this material. Anthony Horsford also played a crucial role by informing me about the existence of this collection of Delius-related papers.

² J Driggers, 'Early Visits to Limpsfield', *Delius Society Journal*, 131 (2002), pp28-36.

³ I am grateful to Amy Feinstein, Special Collections, Jacksonville Public Library for sharing with me scans of the original letters.

⁴ D Gillespie, *The Search for Thomas F. Ward: Teacher of Frederick Delius* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1986).

⁵ Y Parker, 'Writers Wanted his Home', *Jacksonville Journal*, 30th January 1964, p8.

⁶ M.B. Richmond, 'Solano Grove rediscovered', *Delius Society Journal* 82 (1984), pp3-5.

⁷ Helen Faulkner's obituary of Jeff Driggers gives this time span, while Stoneham, pp25-26 discusses conflicting evidence about the years in which the memorial concerts took place. See *Delius Society Journal* 155 (2014), pp78-79.

⁸ Letter reproduced in Appendix.

⁹ Jacksonville Public Library, DELIUS 780.92 D355co, 1946.

¹⁰ The receipt has been preserved in the Limpsfield Church Office.

¹¹ Quoted in J Driggers, 'Early Visits to Limpsfield', *Delius Society Journal* 131 (2002), pp28-36: 31-33.

¹² A seventh letter in the Jacksonville Public Library, dating from ten years later, is of less relevance to our narrative here; it is addressed to Mrs Richmond by her friend, Vera McFarland. This letter, containing a well-crafted description of Limpsfield Church, is cited in Driggers' *Delius Society Journal* article of 2002 (pp34-35).

¹³ L Carley, 'The Harrisons, the Cello Concerto and The Waffrons', *Delius Society Journal* 148 (2010), pp26-29.

¹⁴ K Fountain, 'In a Surrey Garden: The story of the Harrison sisters', *Delius Society Journal* 87 (1985), pp8-11.

¹⁵ L & S Foreman eds., *Felix Aprahamian: Diaries and Selected Writings on Music* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2015), pp196-98.

¹⁶ *Daily Telegraph*, 27th May 1935.

¹⁷ Looking at this final page, I was wondering whether the first page may also have contained details of how to access her donation. If this were the case, it could have been passed to the church treasurer, rather than being filed along with other correspondence with Mrs Richmond.

¹⁸ His obituary can be found at <https://www.nauglefuneral.com/obituaries/Corlis-Driggers-39557#!/Obituary>. [Accessed 17th April 2025]

¹⁹ E Fenby, *Delius as I Knew Him* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1936), pp168-169.

APPENDIX

The following letter from Mrs Livesay, thanking Mr Prentice for his donations, is included in full here, since it was not transcribed for the original 2002 Delius Society Journal article by J. Driggers. 12th May 1946. Jacksonville Public Library, Delius Collection, DELIUS 780.92 D355co, 1946.

LIMPSFIELD CHURCHYARD COMMITTEE.

Hon. Secretary: Mrs. LIVESAY
Tel. Oxted 192

Bettyhill,
Detillens Lane,
Limpsfield,
Surrey.
May 12th, 1946

Cheques payable to Limpsfield Parochial Church Council

Dear Mr. Prentice,

The Rector (Mr. Steer) handed to me, yesterday a £1 for the Churchyard from you, also to-day the Sexton gave me £1 also from you, for the Churchyard, and told me how much you admired our little Churchyard.

So, as Secretary of the Churchyard Committee, I feel I must say thank you for your kind generosity. It encourages me no end, when the Churchyard is admired. I should have much liked to have met you.

Sincerely yours

L. R. Livesay

Hon. Sec.



