

Granddaughter of Queen Victoria in Birchington

Birchington has an interesting connection with an ancestor of Queen Elizabeth II and her husband Prince Philip. Queen Sophia of Greece came to stay in Birchington during the mid-1920s, when her youngest daughter Katherine was at school in Broadstairs. Queen Sophie was one of Queen Victoria's 5 granddaughters, who all became Queens in Europe. As both our Queen and her husband are great-great-grandchildren of Queen Victoria, they are both related to Queen Sophie, who married King Constantine of Greece.

We were made aware of this connection when a book by Julia Gelardi was published entitled "Born to Rule", in which the author spoke of her friendship with the Rev Royston Cole of Birchington. She went on to quote from some of the Queen's letters to the Rev Cole, which are now held in the University of Cambridge. In our research to uncover the full story of this local connection, we discovered that the Rev. R Cole's younger son, who was able to answer some of our queries. The Curate had kept all the Queen's letters, but we were unable to trace any of his replies to her correspondence, though her replies gave us some very clear clues about his answers to her questions.

We have discovered that Queen Sophie stayed in the Beresford Hotel to begin with, but latterly she lodged with two elderly sisters who lived in a large Victorian villa in Station Road, now the site of 'Tan 'n Go'.

Sadly, the nearest our own Queen has come to Birchington is Margate – but you never know – miracles do happen.

NB. There is a booklet on this story in the Birchington Heritage Museum, entitled "The Curate & the Queen" with many more details of this interesting story.