

The Origins and Traditions of the Pearly Kings and Queens of England

The Society was pleased to welcome **Gerry Baxter** on March 9th, when he gave us a lively and very personal account on *the origins and traditions of the Pearly Kings and Queens of England*.

The association dates back to 1875 when Henry Croft, who having been brought up in an orphanage, was given a job of sweeping up and rat catching around a market. He decided that he might get some attention if he made himself a suit of buttons. The buttons were made of mother of pearl, a tradition which continues to this day, despite the difficulty in sourcing them. No Pearly King or Queen would be seen with plastic buttons on their costumes.

Henry Croft himself, wore a top hat and tails, covered in buttons, but Kings wear only flat caps, the hat of the working man. There are traditional patterns, invented ones to suit the wearer and completely smothered suits. Every button, of which there are thousands in a suit, are sewn on individually.

One can only become a Pearly through inheritance or marriage and are unique to London. The Association holds many Christenings and marriages in its church, St Martin in the Fields, in the centre of London. In the crypt of the church can be seen the statue of Henry Croft, which ended up there, having twice been vandalised.

The evening provided us with a fascinating glimpse into a unique association which devotes itself to charitable fundraising.