Callum: Hello I'm Callum Robertson and this is London Life

In the programme today we take a brief look at rhyming slang, an interesting form of vocabulary where an expression which rhymes with word you mean is used, for example, the phrase 'boat race' – the boat race is a famous sporting event held in London but the phrase 'boat race' is also rhyming slang for 'face'. 'Race' rhymes with 'face'.

One of the features of rhyming slang is that often the word that rhymes is not actually said. So for example 'boat race' is shortened to just 'boat'. 'She's got a pretty boat' means she's got a pretty face.

It's not unusual to hear rhyming slang expressions all over the country but perhaps it's best known as Cockney rhyming slang. A cockney is someone who comes from a particular part of east London, but what is rhyming slang and how did it come about?

Here is a true cockney, Larry Barnes to explain. What does he say the word slang stands for and where does he say it comes from.

**LARRY BARNES**
Rhyming slang was originally, well, s – lang, secret language, which I was always taught as a youngster, it was the secret language of the markets so that if a stallholder wanted to talk to a
stallholder on the opposite side of the street without the punters in the middle knowing what he was talking about he'd use rhyming slang.

**Callum:** He says that slang stands for s – lang, secret language and that it came from the markets. The people who work on a market are the stallholders and if they wanted to talk to each other without the customers, or punters, as he calls them understanding, they would use rhyming slang. Listen again

**LARRY BARNES**
Rhyming slang was originally, well, s – lang, secret language, which I was always taught as a youngster, it was the secret language of the markets so that if a stallholder wanted to talk to a stallholder on the opposite side of the street without the punters in the middle knowing what he was talking about he'd use rhyming slang.

**Callum:** He goes on to give an example of a sentence using traditional rhyming slang.

**LARRY BARNES**
He wouldn't say do you fancy a walk down the road to the pub for a quick pint of beer, he's say do you fancy a ball down the frog to the rubber for a quick pint of wallop.

**Callum:** Mmm, I think that needs a little translation! First, let's hear the normal English sentence again.

**LARRY BARNES**
He wouldn't say do you fancy a walk down the road to the pub for a quick pint of beer,

**Callum:** Do you fancy a walk down the road to the pub for a quick pint of beer? Now what about the rhyming slang version?
LARRY BARNES
Do you fancy a ball down the frog to the rubber for a quick pint of wallop,

Callum: do you fancy a ball down the frog to the rubber for a quick pint of wallop. Let's translate that now!

Do you fancy – would you like
A ball – ball is the shortened form of the expression ball and chalk, which is cockney rhyming slang for 'walk'.
Next down the frog
Frog is the shortened form of frog and toad which is rhyming slang for 'road'
Rub is rub a dub - pub
Then we have a quick pint of wallop, wallop isn't rhyming slang but it is an old slang word for beer.

So putting that all together we have – Do you fancy a ball down to the frog for a quick pint of wallop!

A feature of rhyming slang is that it changes and develops. A new book has been published which updates rhyming slang. It's called 'Shame about the boat race' and Duncan Black works for its publisher Collins. He explains how celebrities and characters from television have become part of rhyming slang and he mentions a number of celebrities. Britney Spears is one of them, what is her name rhyming slang for?

DUNCAN BLACK
Well generally new slang terms tend to focus around pop culture and celebrities. My personal favourites are Britneys, for Britney Spears, beers, Basil as in Basil Fawlty, balti. Or Billie Piper as in Windscreen wiper.
Callum: Britney Spears – beers – so now you can say you go down to the pub for a few Britneys. He also mentioned some names from British TV, Basil Fawlty – rhyming slang for the Indian food 'balti' and Billie Piper, slang for windscreen wiper.

Because the slang is coming from celebrities who come and go it means the language changes very quickly, but making new rhyming slang is very easy and is egalitarian. Egalitarian means anyone can do it, it's not something that only specialists and experts can do. Duncan Black explains how.

DUNCAN BLACK
It's very easy to use, it's egalitarian, anyone can have a go, you just need a name or something or someone which rhymes with something.

Callum: Anyone can have a go, he says, anyone can try it, you just need a name which rhymes with something. So why not have a go yourself, try an make a sentence in which you replace the name of an object with the name of a celebrity which rhymes.

That's all for today, I'm off to the Indian for a Basil and some Britneys.