

# Hidden Histories - coded lives

## Polari

Polari is, or was, a sort of gay Esperanto, a mix of Yiddish, Italian, Spanish, Occitan (a hybrid of Spanish and French), Cant (the secret language of thieves and outlaws), Romany, Cockney rhyming slang, backslang and lingua franca (the old pidgin language of Mediterranean traders and seafarers).

Polari flourished in the years between the trial of Oscar Wilde and the 1967 Sexual Offences Act. It was a kind of code, which enabled one gay man to identify another, allowing them to express themselves publicly without fear of arrest.

In the latter half of the 1960s, polari burst out of the closet. The radio comedy sketch show, **Round the Horne**, introduced two regular characters, Julian and Sandy, played by Hugh Paddick and Kenneth Williams, who spoke a version of polari.

Many polari words are still in common use for example chav, naff, zhoosh, drag, dish (as in attractive).



### Find out more

Sound recordings of **Round the Horne** are available to loan from Derbyshire libraries - fantabulosa!