

Siggy Cragwell, Platform Supervisor, Elstree & Borehamwood station



(First picture, credit Bob Redman)

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Siggy Cragwell: 'Owzat for an outstanding contribution?

An Elstree & Borehamwood platform star has hit 80 not out, as he is honoured for his international cricket career and 58 years on the railway.

Thameslink's oldest member of staff has worked on the railways for 58 years and is still playing cricket for England at the ripe old age of 80!

Siggy Cragwell gets up at 04:00 to do the 06:00-11:00 shift as a platform assistant at Elstree & Borehamwood station and then goes to the gym to practise Tai Chi and Taekwondo, to keep him fit for his beloved sport.

The Barbados-born all-rounder from Hampstead started playing for the British Railways League in the 1960s before he joined Gordon Hill's BRSA Enfield Club, now known as Holtwhites & Trinibis.

He has played for London University and a Thames TV side, and has 14 international caps to his name, batting and bowling for the England Over-70s. In one memorable season seven years ago, his side played Australia in three two-day tests and won all three!

Siggy came to Britain from Barbados aged 23 as part of the Windrush generation to help the British government fill vital jobs in hospitals, railways and hotels.

He landed in Southampton on 7 March 1962 after an 11-day voyage and started work as a cleaner in Marylebone station the very next day. "I remember it was strange because it was very cold. They paid for everything, found us somewhere to live and we paid it back as we worked."

Over the next 17 years based at Marylebone he worked as a fireman, stoking steam engines, and a chargeman, supervising cleaners and the men who shunted the trains around the yard. He was then promoted to supervisor at Cricklewood Yard where he also shunted trains himself.

He was at Bedford when he was poached to be a stores manager at Luton. Then someone saw his abilities and stole him again, this time to be a platform supervisor at St Albans, in 1990.

In 2002 he came to Elstree & Borehamwood. "They needed someone with experience because the station was getting busier and busier," he said.

He's been there ever since and is known by hundreds of commuters.

"I used to see them coming through the station when there were seven or eight, said Siggy. "Now they are big men or women, taller than me, with children of their own.

"What I like is mixing with people and conversing with them, getting to know them. I have hundreds of friends and I don't even know their names. Even the youngest come looking for me."

Will Siggy ever retire? "I retired once when I was 65 but came back to work four weeks later. I was never a pub man, a smoker or a betting shop man so there was nothing for me to do. I play a lot of cricket, sometimes three times a week, and I think if I can do that I can work. I can't sit at home and do nothing."

Last year his cricket club held a testimonial match for him and named an end of the ground in his honour. "We lost by two runs, but it was fabulous," he said. "Lots of people from the station came to see me play. That was special."

Siggy won a Gold Excellence Award from GTR but admits that the proudest moment of his career was being on the winning side of the Transport Cricket Cup in the late 1980s.

Testimonials

Bob Redman, Chairman of 'First Impressions' and Secretary of Elstree Screen Heritage*

"Siggy arrived at Elstree & Borehamwood railway station in 2007, and over the years since he has become the best-known friendly face at our station.

"I knew Siggy before I knew his name; he was always happy to assist me and any other passenger, a voice of calm on Platform One!

"Siggy's 'fan club' is legendary and he can often be found surrounded by passengers who just want to say, 'Hello'.

"In 2018 when we celebrated the 150th anniversary of our local rail service, it was clear that we needed to include Siggy in our documentary video*. His easy charm shines through in his interview."

* First Impressions is the multi-agency organisation that promotes Elstree and Borehamwood as a destination for visitors interested in its fascinating screen heritage, and uses that heritage to make public spaces more welcoming for visitors and residents.

** Video can be viewed at <https://vimeo.com/257750424>; Siggy's interview along with his co-worker Paul Green is from 16:10.

Nigel Gale, Thameslink passenger:

"Siggy is a beloved dispatcher at Elstree & Borehamwood station during the morning peak, and although I try to speak to him daily, he has become so popular that even getting a couple of moments to say hello is becoming difficult.

"He is such a warm and friendly gentleman, always 'can-do', regardless of the situation, always making it clear to customers that he is on their side, which makes them valued and helps to vent frustration when things go wrong.

"I am really overdue in putting him forward for an award of recognition, but would appreciate it if you could please, and that comes from the entire Gale household. Many thanks."

Marc Asamoah, Station Manager:

"Siggy has been a wonderful colleague to manage and is the definition of exceeding expectations for customer service. Every time I am trying to get a 1-2-1 with him, there are always customers around him wanting to talk to him; that is how loved he is.

"Despite his age, Siggy is always pro-active, always wanting to help and ensuring the station is well looked after. I have managed Siggy for a year now and I could not think of a member of my team who has supported me more in taking care of Elstree and Borehamwood station."

Photographs included:

Siggy Cragwell on the platform at Elstree & Borehamwood

Siggy Cragwell with station colleague Paul Green, credit Bob Redman

Holtwhites & Trinibis Cricket Club's Testimonial Match for Siggy Cragwell