



FRANK BAILEY: FATHER OF BLACK FIREFIGHTING

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Frank Bailey came to England from Guyana in 1953.

He wanted to become a firefighter however a Fire Brigade Union rep told Frank that "Black people were not employed by the fire service." Regardless, Frank applied and joined West Ham Fire Brigade in 1955 where he was accepted and served at Silvertown Fire Station. It made Frank the first full time Black firefighter in the UK.

He said: "I was told that the authorities were not hiring black men because they were not strong enough physically or well enough educated to do the job. I said I'm going to apply and see if they find me unfit. I saved a fellow firefighter's life when he fainted. We

were on the fifth floor. I brought him down to the ground in a fireman's lift. The guy was 16 stone and 6'2."

He left firefighting in 1965 and retrained as a social worker, working in Kensington and Chelsea until his retirement in 1990. He consistently championed equality and the rights of working people, particularly black people.

Frank died in 2016. In a statement read out at Frank's funeral, London Fire Commissioner Ron Dobson acknowledged Frank's enormous contribution to the service: "Frank was a pioneer and rightly challenged the outdated practices prevalent at the time."