



# Chris Lightfoot

**Y**ou've heard the saying about goalkeepers having to be a bit crazy? Well, that phrase was coined for Chris Lightfoot.

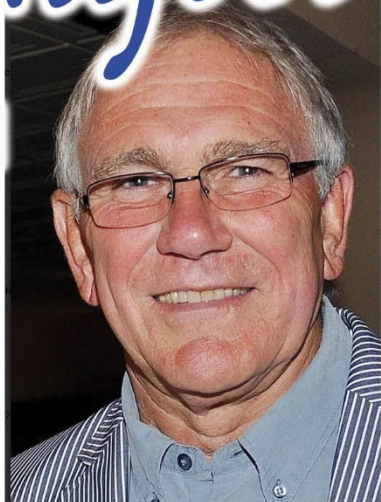
Growing up as a Stones fan in the late 1960s and 1970s we seemed to have a production line of brave and talented keepers through Andy Williams and Chris Swain, on to John Barr, Roy Mackenzie and then the frankly foolhardy John Morton (a regular these days in the commentary box) who combined lightning reactions with a recklessness verging on the suicidal.

But then we signed the Liverpoolian glove-man Chris Lightfoot. And we realised that here was a goalie who wasn't just prepared to put his 6ft 1inch, 14 stone frame on the line in every game, but he was delighted to give us the sort of laughs that many Stones fans still reminisce about even today.

"Oh, I just wanted everyone to enjoy themselves and do my best for the club and the fans" said the now-75 year old Scouser when I caught up with him for a chat at Christmas. "They had come to the game to be entertained and I liked to muck about in goal a bit... diving late when the ball had already gone past the post, theatricals when the ball went over the crossbar... that sort of thing".

**Right: Chris Lightfoot comes to punch this cross from the head of team mate Pat Ferry while Hereford's Jullan Marshall lurks during the first drawn game at Lower Mead. Wealdstone's Bobby Moss and Paul Thomas block the goalline (right) with Fred Barwick**

**Chris was the archetypal 'crazy keeper' of the 1970s.. and what off the wall tales he has to tell!**



"What about that game when you were booked for trying to blow the ball out of the penalty area?" I asked him, half-remembering an away game in the late 1970s when he tried the patience of a short-tempered referee.

"Ah yes, that was Telford away - he had warned me for timewasting in the second half, when I was kicking my boots against the post to get off the mud (well, it was 2-2 and we were desperate for a point in a relegation battle) and I'd wound him up by sprinting over like Usain Bolt to the corner flag and then sprinting back to take the next goalkick and asking him if that



was quick enough. He was shaking his head in annoyance and when I went to take a short goal-kick to our fullback, Paul Thomas, I realised I'd topped the ball with my left foot and it wasn't going to make it out of the box... so I dropped down on all fours and pretended to blow it out, cheeks puffing away. Of course he booked me, but it was worth it to see the Telford fans p\*\*\*\*\*g themselves with laughter".

"Weren't you booked in that famous Reading FA Cup game too?" I asked Chris. "Yes that's right, I was booked for marking the six-yard box with my studs, as all keepers used to do in those days - a long scrape to show where you were, to give you your bearings, although it was illegal of course. It was right at the start of the second half and I trotted up to the Elmslie End which we were defending, before the referee came out, and scraped my mark.. next thing I knew the ref was running over and booking me. 'That wasn't me!' I protested to him, 'it must have been the Reading keeper in the first half'. The ref said 'No, I saw you doing it' and I said 'No you didn't because I did it before you came out'... well, that was so funny we were both laughing but he carried on and booked me



anyway!"

That was in December 1977 as the Stones knocked out Division Four side Reading 2-1 at Lower Mead on a day of raw drama on the gluepot pitch. "I loved Lower Mead" said Chris. "A quirky, closed-in ground with the crowd up close, always had a great atmosphere and all the FA Cup games were great that season. We beat Maidstone in the final qualifying round 2-1, a real humdinger of a game with George Duck getting both, then the 0-0 draw with Third Division Hereford United at home... and the away game was amazing.

"I'm an Evertonian and it was Kevin Sheedy, who had a great career for Everton but was only 17 then, scored from outside the box. That seemed to relax us and we played them off the park and went 3-1 up, Bobby Moss headed one goal and Pat Ferry scored two. They got one back near the end but we really deserved that victory.

"Then the next day we had to face the music! Me and Pat were schoolteachers at the same school in Romford, and we'd both made excuses to the Head to get off early so we could make the team coach at lunchtime, never thinking that we'd be plastered all over the newspapers as giantkillers the next day (The Sun had the headline 'Ferry Ferry good' on their report)... well, we had a bit of explaining to do, I can tell you!"

Chris had been larger than life in that momentous cup run, only beaten by a freak goal

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# CHRIS LIGHTFOOT CONTINUED..

from Reading's Lawrie Sanchez in the closing stages of the 2-1 Second Round win at Lower Mead. What did he remember of the Third Round tie at QPR?

"Oh, what a disappointment. For me personally. All anyone talks about is the first goal, the sort of goal we were desperate NOT to concede, and it was down to me. And it was all the worse because I was feeling really, really good about my performances up to that point.

"This is what happened. Rangers' John Hollins swung in a freekick from the right and I thought 'I could get this' then realised it was bending away from me so took a step back... Don Givens was favourite to get on the end of it and I threw myself to the right expecting a bullet header, ready to palm the ball round the post but he sort of misconnected and the ball came to me much more slowly than I expected. So I was in the process of catching it when the ball caught my arm, hit the inside of the post and bounced in. Of course as I keeper you can't make mistakes... you take the glory and you take the flak. All I saw were all the backs of our players shirts as they walked away upfield. The worst feeling in the world, knowing all the expectation and all the fans who'd made the journey hoping for a repeat of our heroics.

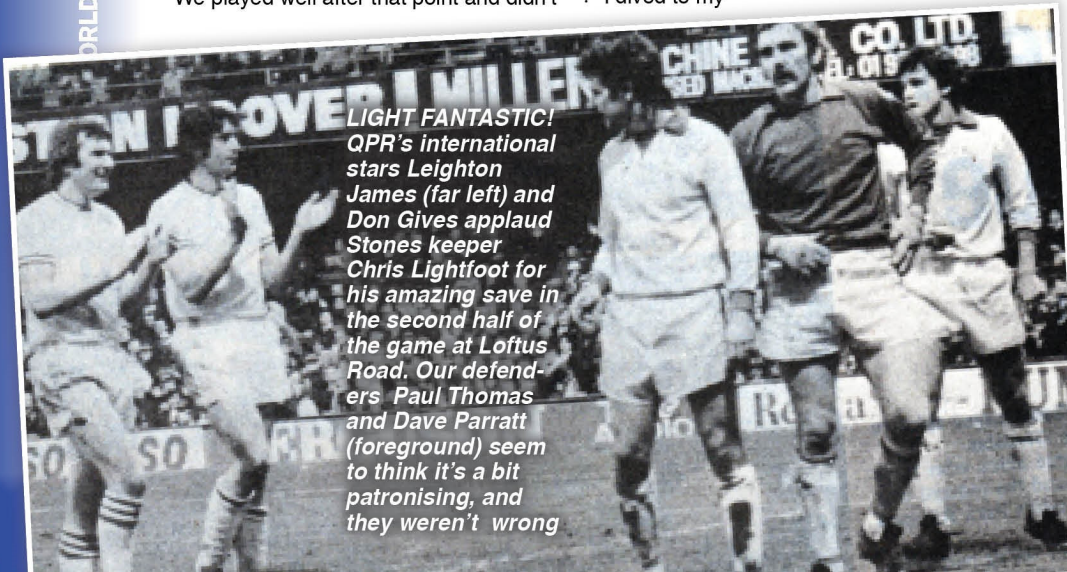
"We played well after that point and didn't



deserve the 4-0 scoreline at the end. My other big memory was Stan Bowles scoring from the penalty spot. It wasn't a penalty by the way, but I was a huge Stan Bowles fan and used to go and watch him play whenever I could, so I knew that he always had the same routine - a little shimmy in the run-up, and then he placed the ball into the corner, low to the keeper's right.

So I was ready. He ran up and shimmied, I dived to my

**LIGHT FANTASTIC!**  
*QPR's international stars Leighton James (far left) and Don Givens applaud Stones keeper Chris Lightfoot for his amazing save in the second half of the game at Loftus Road. Our defenders Paul Thomas and Dave Parratt (foreground) seem to think it's a bit patronising, and they weren't wrong*



# WEALDSTONE 2020-21

**George Duck (left) sees this cross just evade his head in the titanic game with Reading at Lower Mead. Keith Furphy is on the right**



right... and he placed the ball in the top left hand corner! I'd never seen him do that before!"

**C**hris was only with the Stones for two seasons, but they were memorable ones. "And I loved every minute" he says. "There were such big characters around: Mossy and Pat Ferry, Billy Byrne, John Arnold, Furze and of course Willie Watson. Willie just cracked me up.

"He used to love to take off the manager Alan Fogarty's accent - he was a Brummie - I remember one game against Dover when Willie was playing at sweeper alongside Dave Parratt and near the end of the game he nutmegged their striker in our own box and flicked the ball past another to set up an attack, and Foggy went ballistic. "I know you're a good player Willie but you can't do that" he shouted at him. "Remember Bobby Moore in Katowice against Poland? Best defender in the world - he lost the ball and England lost. So what you do is three things: You either pass it back to Chris in goal, or you play it to the full back, or you hit it long. Okay? You got that?"

So the next game Willie was just trotting down the tunnel and Foggy shouted out to him: "So Willie - do you remember? What do you do?"

He looked over his shoulder and called back: "Give it to Martin Peters".

**C**hris was born in Liverpool but his family moved to Crewe, in Cheshire. He went to Nantwich Grammar School and played in goal for Crewe's A team while he was at Warwick University - but his first cub was Atherstone Town in the West Midlands League.

"Six quid a week, £2 win bonus and £1 for a draw; I thought my ship had come in" he laughs. His performances for the Adders earned a move to AP Leamington in the Southern League Div One (North) for several seasons, including a 5-2 defeat at Wealdstone in April 1972 - the Stones were first season of Southern League football.

Chris then got a teaching job in Romford, Essex but was still playing back in the East Midlands at Leamington. "The travelling was a bit daft but I knew one of the Dartford coaches Robbie Stepney so was I training there midweek, and incidentally the Darts had John Morton in goal. He was teacher too so we kept bumping into each other.

"I then signed for Romford in the Southern League Prem and so played against the Stones them in 1974-75... Romford had been one of the big non League clubs but the chairman had built a giant new stand at their speedway stadium and that was a bit of a millstone around their neck. They ended up going the way of a lot of clubs in the 70s and 80, having to sell the ground to survive, like Guildford City and of course Wealdstone.

"Anyway, Geoff Coleman was the Stones manager in 1976 and he had always rated me - he had tried to sign me for Nuneaton several times - and when he asked me to sign that September as cover for Morty (who was injured) it was an easy decision. I'd started the season playing for Leyton Wingate in the Athenian League and, without being funny, it just didn't seem right when I was used to playing at a decent level in front of decent crowds.

"I made my debut at Nuneaton, funnily enough, and although we lost 2-0 it was like being back in the big time. That was always my goal, to play at that level but it wasn't to last. I was FA Cup tied with Leyton Wingate so Morty, now back from injury, played in all the Cup games that season and we had a good run, going out 1-0 at Reading. But I played in most of the league games and ended the season saving a penalty from Jimmy Greaves as we

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# CHRIS LIGHTFOOT CONTINUED..

won 2-1 at Chelmsford”

“But managers can be strange. They either fancy you or they don’t... and when Geoff Coleman left to be replaced by his No.2 Foggy it was clear that it was the latter.”

**D**espite Lightfoot’s heroics in the early part of the 77-78 season, including the unprecedented FA Cup run, Fogarty was angling to replace his regular 32-year-old No.1 with young ex-Southend and Spurs stopper Ian Cranstone.

“Foggy made no bones about wanting to bring in the youngster but I was on contract and was left hanging around for the rest of that season, playing for the reserves in front on one man and a dog or being made to report to grounds for first team matches knowing that I wasn’t in the team (and no bench duty either in those days).

“That summer I was given the chance to do some coaching in the US in the school holidays and asked Foggy if I could stay in shape out there and be back in time for the first league game.... of course he put Cranny in goal for the first game at Gravesend (which we lost 5-2) but he wasn’t available for the next one against Telford United who had Geoff Hurst as player manager -I kept a clean sheet in a 3-0 win but the manager told me afterwards ‘You may have played well but you’re never playing for the 1st XI again’ - and he then had me in for training for five consecutive nights, travelling across from Romford.

“That broke me and I agreed to tear up my contract”. I said to Chris “That is so extreme - it must have been all about getting the wage bill down, not needing two keepers.”

“Yes, you’re probably right but if he’d just told me that I’d have understood, and parted on good terms.”

Chris had left teaching around that time - moving into leisure management - and the family had moved to Woking. His football career ended in the Athenian League with

Epsom & Ewell, and then Carshalton.

**H**e is now retired and living in a village near Matlock in Derbyshire, playing a lot of golf and watching a fair amount of non-League football at Matlock Town, Alfreton and Chesterfield. His very last game of football came some 20 years ago when he turned out for an ex-Stones XI at Edgware against a star-studded showbiz XI... and it ended in agony when he was carried off the field with two broken ribs.

“It was all my own fault - Martin Chivers

chipped the ball towards my top corner and instinct took over as I forgot I was now 55 years old with an unconditioned body. I thought ‘I can save this’ and took off to try and tip the ball over the top.. and I landed something like point four on the Richster Scale. It was agony!”

But his worst injury came on a bleak Tuesday night at Yeovil in February 1977. “It was the next night after my daughter was born - in those days you wouldn’t think twice about going off to play football with

your wife in labour - and I collided with Willie Watson’s kneecap halfway through the game. I was concussed and actually lost my memory... I spent 24 hours in Yeovil hospital but couldn’t remember a thing about the game for days afterwards.

“It makes me laugh these days when you hear about how brave a keeper is when he makes a routine save at a forward’s feet. Being brave for £200k a week. I was brave for a fiver!”

“Thinking back, Yeovil wasn’t a happy place for me... the fans were always horrible there. Though what I remember most about going to Yeovil was being forced to wear a red goal-keeper’s top when I was playing for Romford, who wore blue and gold. Obviously I couldn’t wear blue, or my usual green as that was what Yeovil wore... but I wasn’t going to wear red as I’m an Everton bluenose through and through!

So I found a black top of my own and wore that. The referee wasn’t happy but I got away with it!”



*Stones’ boss Alan Fogarty (back row far left) was hell bent on replacing Chris with young Ian Cranstone (back row far right)*