

## KELSEY, ALFRED JOHN (Jack) (1929-1992), association football player

**Name:** Alfred John Kelsey  
**Date of birth:** 1929  
**Date of death:** 1992  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** association football player  
**Area of activity:** Sports and Leisure Pursuits  
**Author:** Richard E. Huws

Born at 382 Jersey Road, Winch Wen, Llansamlet, Swansea, on 19 November 1929, the second of three children born to Alfred Kelsey (1897-1980) and Sarah Ann Kelsey née Howe (1902-2000). His father was a Londoner, born within the sound of the Bow bells, who came to Wales with his family in 1911 where he was subsequently employed as a smelter furnace man in one of the many works that peppered the lower Swansea Valley at the time.

The young Jack Kelsey attended Cwm School, leaving at a young age to join his father in the tinplate industry, later becoming a crane driver, before completing his national service. He played football for Winch Wen FC in the Swansea and District League, a club his father served as chairman for 12 years, and where his extraordinary talents as a goalkeeper impressed many including Les Morris, a local football manager, who had been on Arsenal's books during the pre-war years. Morris arranged for the young Kelsey to receive trials with his former club, and the club was sufficiently impressed with his performance to offer him an immediate contract, and he signed for the Highbury giants in 1949.

Initially he acted as the understudy to the dependable George Swindin (1914-2005), but eventually the Welshman became the club's first-choice goalkeeper. His first team debut was made during the 1950-51 season, but after conceding eight goals in his first two appearances, he returned to the reserve team. However, in 1952-53 he made 29 appearances in the Arsenal first team that won the first division championship. By the following season, 1953-54, he had made the position his own, and his skills as one of the best post-war goalkeepers were soon recognised, especially in view of the fact that he was playing in what can only be considered to be a rather mediocre Arsenal side in comparison with those of previous years.

Kelsey was universally recognised as a master craftsman in his trade, and although not flamboyant, he depended instead on his excellent positional instinct and safe handling and he was also acknowledged to be totally brave and fearless in his actions. He made 327 first team league games for Arsenal between 1950 and 1963, but in total he appeared 548 times for the club if reserve, cup and friendly matches are also taken into consideration. His pre-eminence as the leading British goalkeeper was acknowledged on 13 August 1955 when he played for the Great Britain & Northern Ireland team in a friendly match against the Rest of Europe at Windsor Park, Belfast.

He also made 41 appearances for Wales, and the success of the Welsh team at the 1958 World Cup, when they reached the quarter finals, was largely attributable to Kelsey's heroic performances. Although Wales eventually lost to a deflected goal from an unknown 17 year old youngster called Edison Arantes do Nascimento, better known by his nickname Pelé (born 1940), the Brazilians were very complimentary of Kelsey's performance and referred to him as 'the cat with the magnetic claws'. Pelé, later conceded that 'this was one of my most unforgettable goals - my luckiest, and my most important'. Kelsey in turn, the ever consummate gentleman, although disappointed in defeat, predicted that 'this young kid has a good future', and the pair were re-united at Highbury during one of the Brazilian's visits to London in the 1980s and were famously photographed together.

Sadly, an accidental collision with another Brazilian forward Vavá (Edvaldo Izidio Neto; 1934-2002) on 16 May 1962 during a friendly match in São Paulo left Kelsey with a painful back injury from which he never really recovered, and within less than a year in February 1963 he was forced to hang up his football boots for good. On 20 May 1963, Glasgow Rangers came to Highbury to play in a testimonial match for him. Kelsey could not participate in the match, but the proceeds realised £7,000.

He remained loyal to the Arsenal, and served the club in a commercial capacity until his retirement in 1989. He also arranged for Arsenal to play at the Halfway Park, Winch Wen, to celebrate the 60th anniversary of his first club; Kelsey died before the match took place, but Arsenal honoured their commitment and came to Swansea on 31 July 1993 to fulfil the fixture.

Kelsey married Myrtle Elsie Hodgetts, (also known as Hudson) (1929-1987), at Swansea Registry Office on 22 March 1954. They met at a dance in Islington Town Hall in 1951. She was born at Uxbridge where her father was stationed with the Royal Air Force.

Jack Kelsey died at his Friern Barnet, North London home on 18 March 1992, aged 62 years after a brief illness. He was cremated at Hendon Crematorium. His parents are buried in Morrision Cemetery. As noted, his wife predeceased him in 1987, and they are survived by two sons Paul (born 1958) and Peter (born 1961) who both live outside Wales. However, some of Kelsey's family still live in the Swansea area, and his sister Christine Ann (Tina) Slattery (1943-2008) was married to the brother of Clive Slattery, who made 70 appearances for Swansea Town / City from 1968-72. Kelsey's eldest sister Winifred Lorraine Watkins (born 1925) settled in the Bristol area.

Jack Kelsey will always be remembered as one of the finest goalkeepers to play in British and international football. He was also a gentleman and possessed a very wicked sense of humour typified by his tongue-in-cheek remark to his biographer, Brian Glanville, that his excellent handling was chiefly attributable to the rubbing of chewing gum on his hands prior to every match!

### Author

Richard E. Huws

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Information supplied by Jack Kelsey's niece Michelle Raven of Birchgrove, Swansea, and Lyndon Elsey, Assistant Registrar of Cemeteries and Crematorium, City and County of Swansea

### Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Jack Kelsey](#)

## Additional Links

VIAF: 260413484

Wikidata: Q942385

**Published date:** 2013-03-11

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### APA Citation



Huws, R. E., (2013). KELSEY, ALFRED JOHN (Jack) (1929-1992), association football player. *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*. Retrieved 21 Nov 2024, from <https://biography.wales/article/s8-KELS-JOH-1929>

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