

No.38 Alexander Douglas Talbot

Of the 100 or so Football League players who have progressed through Hednesford Town, half a dozen were absolute thoroughbreds; Alec Talbot, at 6ft 1in and 12st 7lb, was one of those.

He learned his ball control and balance by swerving in and out of sticks placed two feet apart on a patch of ground in the upper part of Bradbury Lane. This was typical of the application and attention to detail of a man with football in his blood; His father, Jack, played at wing-half for us in the 1890's; Two uncles, forward Alfred and goalkeeper Arthur both played for Hednesford - Arthur moved to Arsenal in 1896. Another uncle, Ezekiah, was also registered with us prior to 1914.

Alec, born in Cannock 13 July 1902, was the elder of four footballing brothers, Ray, Horace and Les, who all played in local leagues. Horace followed Alec to Villa Park and Les joined first Blackburn Rovers then Cardiff City and finally Walsall. He later coached FC Haarlem in Holland.

Alec, the best of a fine footballing family, served as a wing-half and centre-half for Hednesford Town from August 1921. During 1921-22 and 1922-23 he was a member of the Allen, Talbot and Shaw half-back line which is thought to have been the best ever at the Keys.

Alec joined Aston Villa for £100 in April 1923 along with his best pal Teddy Bowen; they had been childhood friends, West Hill school pals, Hednesford and now Aston Villa, team-mates. He made his first senior appearance for them, 2 February 1924, in a 2-0 FA Cup win at Swansea Town alongside former Hednesford man, Billy Walker, (Alec would take over the Villa captaincy when Billy retired).

But, surprisingly, during his first five years at Villa Park, he was unable to hold down a regular place in the first-team, making only 36 senior appearances. However, from November 1928, Alec was a regular at the heart of the Villa defence until 1934 as part of a middle line comprising Jimmy Gibson, himself and Joe Tate, and known affectionately as 'Wind, Sleet and Rain'. He was an ever-present in successive seasons from 1930 to 1932 and had a run of 150 consecutive League appearances from September 1929 to November 1933.

Unfortunately, he failed to win a major prize with Villa, twice gaining League runners-up medals, in 1931 and 1933, and playing in two FA Cup semi-final defeats, by Portsmouth in 1929 and Manchester City in 1934. He appeared in an England trial in 1931 alongside Harold Shaw, but failed to get any further recognition, although he did represent the Football League against the Scottish League in 1933.

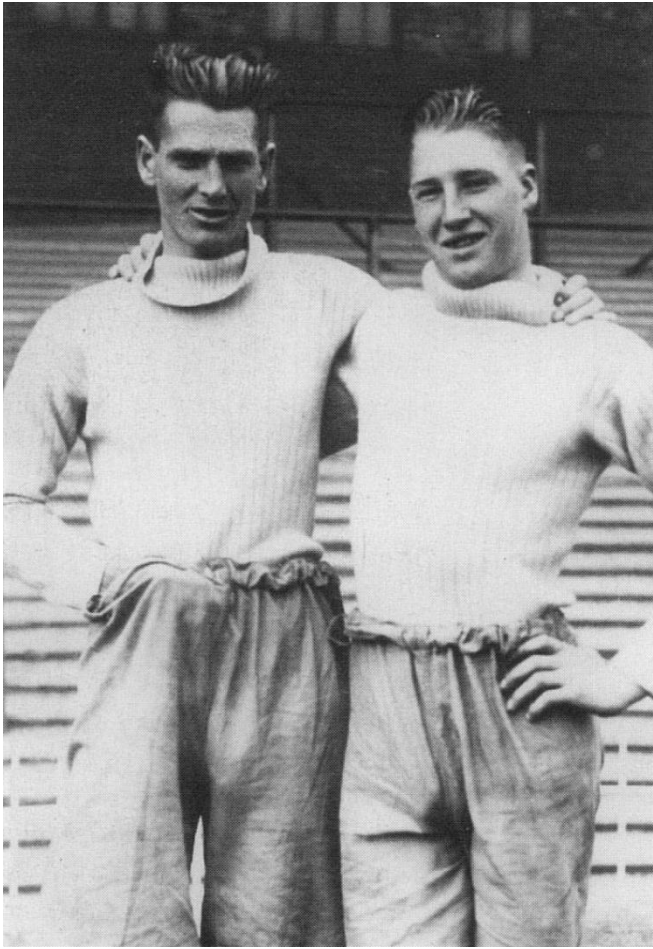
Finally, in 1935, a month before his 34th birthday, he moved to Bradford Park Avenue (then in Division Two) but after just six games for them he returned to the Midlands, first to Brierley Hill and then Stourbridge. Alec played several times at the Keys for Stourbridge, who he also managed for a spell, before finally quitting football in 1947.

Until his retirement in 1967, he worked as a vehicle inspector at the Austin car plant in Longbridge. Alec died in Stourbridge, 13 August 1975. He had played 263 senior games for Villa and scored seven goals in his 13 years with them.

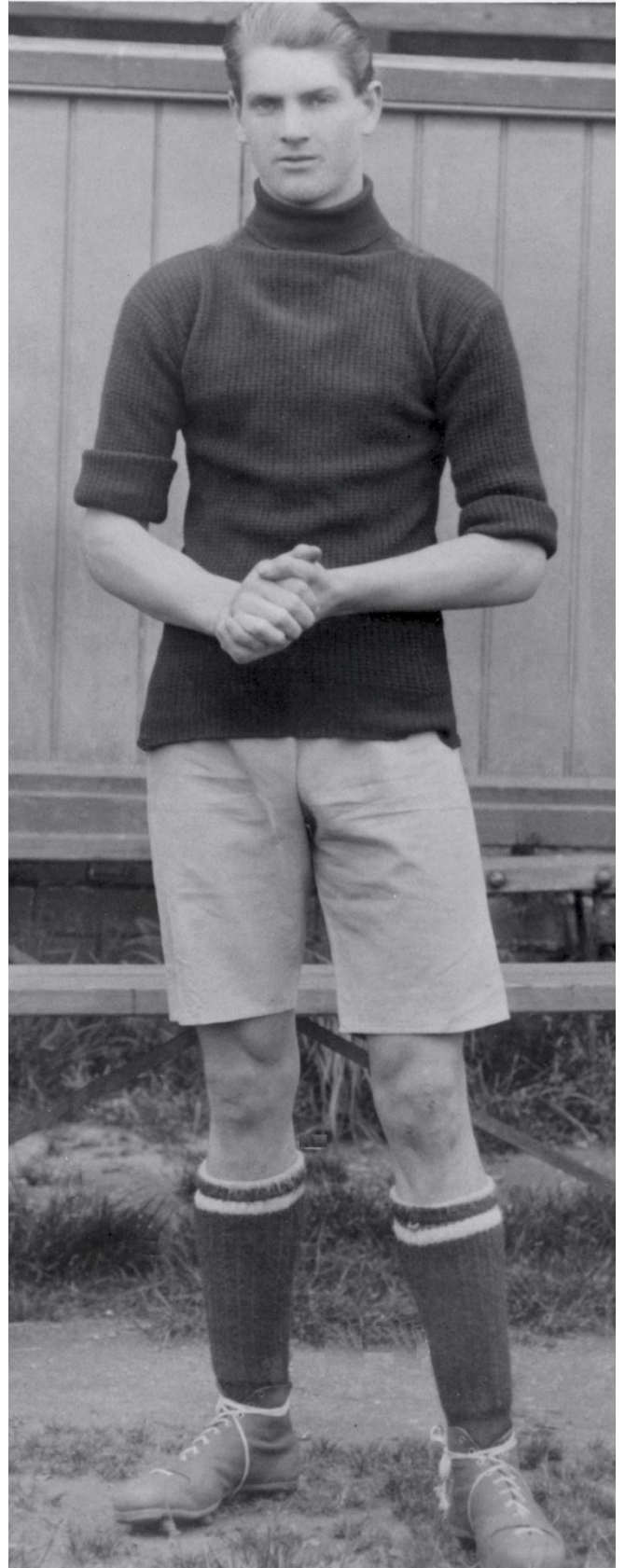
Long-striding, head held high, Alec was a supreme defender, a credit to the game both on and off the field. His lifelong friend, Teddy Bowen, when interviewed for our Centenary Book in 1979, described Alec as being a player of 'poise, pluck and shrewdness with an artistic streak to go with his free consistency'. Unflappable, neat and sharp in style, he could also be a forceful player who would ping a pass with great precision up to 40 yards; He had confidence to spare but was never showy.



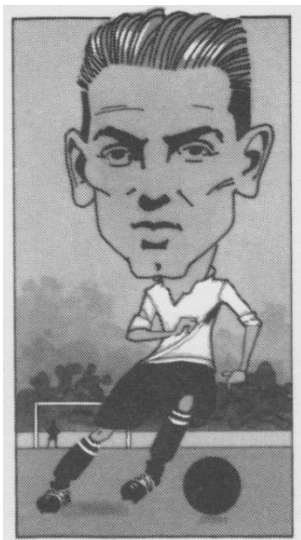
From the Dave Shaw archive



Alec with his brother Horace at Villa Park in the early 1930s.



Alec on the Cross Keys ground in 1923.



From a set of 24 by Dave Shaw



Alec stands fourth from the left and Teddy Bowen extreme right with another former Hednesford man, Billy Walker, at Villa Park in 1925-26.