

THE KEEPER

British-German (2018) 120 minutes

Director: Marcus H. Rosenmüller

Cast: David Kross (Bert Trautmann), Freya Mavor (Margaret Friar), John Henshaw (Jack Friar)



Screening 05 January 2022 at Swindon Arts Centre

Synopsis

A true story of a young English woman and a soccer-playing German POW as they overcome prejudice, public hostility and personal tragedy near the end of World War II.

Reviews



No goalkeeper ever had more anxiety at the penalty kick than Bert Trautmann, the German PoW who stayed on in Britain after the second world war, played for Manchester City 1949-1964, and in the 1956 FA Cup Final became a legend for playing to the final whistle with a broken neck.

Initially, the very presence of this former Wehrmacht soldier caused outrage in Manchester, particularly among its Jewish community. But his sincere disgust at Nazi war crimes, his decency, humility, marriage to a British woman – and his great performances on the pitch – won the city over. What proved decisive was a remarkable open letter to the press from Manchester's communal rabbi, asking for Trautmann to be given a chance.

This straightforward historical romance is well played by David Kross as Trautmann and Freya Mavor as Margaret, with whom he fell in love. John Henshaw gives a typically excellent performance as Margaret's plain-speaking dad. A really watchable film, although Trautmann's own romantic life might have been a bit more complicated than it suggests. A muscular and sympathetic story.

Peter Bradshaw, The Guardian

You'd have to work very hard to kill the story of Bert Trautmann. Indeed, it is astonishing that we are only now seeing a biopic of the former German prisoner-of-war who became a successful goalkeeper for Manchester City.

One of the clunkier sub-plots has an implausibly posh sergeant-major stand-in for the 'Little Englander' views that Bert had to fight against. The decision to have Bert's future wife care for cage birds while he is in the camp earns a slap from the metaphor police and there is some questionable use of footage from Belsen to press home unforgotten realities.

For the most part this is a delightful slab of commercial film-making that efficiently orders the vital elements in Trautmann's story. Played with charm by David Kross, Bert is in detention when Jack Friar (John Henshaw) spots him at a kickabout and signs him for Saint Helen's Town. He really did marry Jack's daughter and secure a place at Manchester City. The film gives a convincingly cosy version of Lancashire in the post-war years. The story's underlying message has ended up more relevant than the film-makers can ever have anticipated.

Donald Clarke, Irish Times

Film Facts

- Awards include Best Film at the Bavarian Film Awards and the Audience Award at the Jewish Film Festival in Sonoma County.
- Trautmann was the first foreigner to be named 'Footballer of the Year' in 1956.
- The Belfast football team Glentoran's stadium, the Oval, was used for exterior shots covering as the old Maine Road football stadium.