

John Humphrey Burcher was born at 137 Cleveland street, Chippendale on 21st February 1915 at the home of his grand parents John and Sarah Young, living there as well were his mother Rachel, father John and older sister Rita.

About 1920 John Humphrey went to Cleveland Street Boys school, just about a year after the electric lighting was installed in the area. The school was made famous by some outstanding sporting personalities, such as Andrew Boy Charlton, -Three times Champion Olympian swimmer in 1924, '28 and '32, also Alan Kippeax, Charlie Kelleway, Charlie Macartney and Bert Oldfield – Cricketers – between 1920-1937. The 1925 Sheffield Shield was a unique moment in the school's history. Young John Humphrey would have been inspired by them.

At age of 14, his first job was at Marchants soft drink factory in Bourke Street Redfern, then for a short while after that, at the glass works, but had to leave as the straw in the packing cases gave him hay fever.

For recreation he played rugby league foot ball and cricket at near by Moore Park and at other times was part of the youth group at St Saviors Anglican Church.

The Youngs and the Burchers being of Irish and German descent, were generally poor, but socially connected well with each other, there was the usual wedding and dances to attend and during the summer months swimming at Bronte Beach by which they would go by tram.

As Dad grew older he would cycle to Cronulla to be with his cousins Jim and Jack Hughes. Their family owned a boat, so there was fishing and prawning as well as swimming and bush walking.

These trips away from the inner city must have done him a lot of good, away from the treeless brick streets and the factories of Redfern and Waterloo, away from the smoke grime and smells from their chimneys.

Cronulla in the 1930's was still a bit like the country with scattered bush and paddocks and along the coast beaches, sand dunes and rocky outcrops. These were still the depression years, so because of the market gardens, chook runs and dairy cows and the good fishing spots, it was easier for him to enjoy

fresh vegetables (and black berries), milk, eggs and fish – thank God he had these opportunities.

Towards the end of the 1930's he took on probationary training with the fire brigade and at the commencement of the second world war did basic training in the army, but was not able to go on with either, because of health problems.

In 1941 a surprise attack by Japanese aircraft on Pearl Harbour, Honolulu, home base of the US Pacific fleet, brought America into WW2. In 1942 the war came to Australia when more than 100 Japanese aircraft launched an Air Raid on Darwin. A few months later, three Japanese midget submarines entered Sydney Harbour and torpedoed the ferry Kuttabul, killing 19 Australian sailors.

Among all these political issues John Humphrey met Lola Barnes in 1940 and married her in 1941 at St Andrews Church of England Summer Hill. In due course much to the delight of both grand parents they had three sons, Harvey in 1943, Robert in 1946 and David in 1949.

In 1950 John Humphrey worked for G J Coles and Co as head storeman at their Liverpool Street city store in Sydney.

Earlier that year Coles had bought out Selfridges, a small department store also in Liverpool Street, backing onto Anthony Hordens.

On the Friday night of 17th November that year there was a fire in the basement of Selfridges.

John Humphrey being the head storeman was asked to assess the damage to the stock, which was in the fire/water damaged basement.

While there on the Saturday morning, a section of the ceiling collapsed and he was killed, along with the manager of Selfridges, Sam Turner.

Both were married with children, a terrible tragedy and just before Christmas too. Harvey was only 7y., Robert 4y. and David 1y. old.

John Humphrey loved his wife Lola and their three boys, he was loved by all who know him.

His ashes are in the Waverley cemetery with his Mum and Dad, and his Grandmother and Grandfather Young.

Harvey Burcher
1st May, 2006