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JOHN THOMAS LEY

A MURDERER IN OUR MIDST

The Australian Dictionary of Biography describes J.T. Ley as a 'politician and murderer' and *The Australian Encyclopedia* identifies him, perhaps more politically, as a 'politician and criminal!'

John Thomas Ley was born on the 28 October 1880 at Bath in the County of Somerset in southern England.

His father, employed as a butler, died in 1882 and, four years later, his mother migrated to Australia with her mother and her four children.

They settled in Sydney where young John earned money as a paper-boy and messenger.

He attended Crown Street Public School but left when he was 10 to help his mother in a grocery store she had bought. He later found work on a farm at Windsor and, with an ambition to become a lawyer, he studied shorthand at night and eventually gained employment as a junior clerk-stenographer in a Sydney solicitor's office.

In 1896, Ley joined the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts where he developed considerable debating skills.

In 1898, he married Emily Vernon, daughter of a wealthy doctor. They lived with the widowed Mrs Vernon at Glebe and had three sons.

In 1901 he transferred to Norton, Smith and Co. and was articled in 1906.

The following year, Ley and his family moved to Hurstville and, just five months later he was elected to the local council. He was involved in local issues and, as an advocate for prohibition, he earned the nickname 'Lemonade Ley.'

After losing several elections for mayor, Ley decided to become involved in State politics.

Meanwhile, he had been admitted as a solicitor on 13 March 1914.

He strongly supported conscription and, in March 1917, He was elected to the New South Wales Legislative Assembly for the seat of Hurstville for the National Party.

He joined the breakaway Progressive Party (later Country Party) and, in 1920, won

