



ROYAL AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

# MEDIA RELEASE

## Soldier, Rhodes Scholar, pioneering neurosurgeon – the remarkable life of Hugh Cairns

**Friday 6 May, 2011**

Delegates to the 80<sup>th</sup> Annual Scientific Congress (ASC) of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons have been told of the extraordinary life of Hugh Cairns, an Australian pioneer in the field of neurosurgery.

Born in Port Pirie in 1896, Cairns interrupted his fourth year of medical studies at the University of Adelaide to enlist as a private in the army, serving in the Dardanelles and France. After the war he was awarded a Rhodes Scholarship, enabling him to further his studies at Balliol College, Oxford. It was to be the beginning of an extraordinary career – the subject of a presentation given to delegates by Associate Professor Susan Neuhaus, an Adelaide based General Surgeon.

Cairns worked initially as an anatomy demonstrator and subsequently at Radcliffe Infirmary. He decided to enter the relatively new discipline of neurosurgery and travelled to Boston on a Rockefeller Traveling Fellowship in 1926, where he trained under Harvey Cushing.

Returning to Britain, Cairns forged a career as a neurosurgeon before becoming the first Nuffield Professor of Surgery in Oxford and founder of the neurosurgical unit at the Radcliffe Infirmary.

During the Second World War Cairns became a pioneer of military neurosurgery, developing mobile field neurosurgical units. Cairns and fellow South Australian Rhodes Scholar, Howard Florey, introduced the use of penicillin into the management of casualties in North Africa.

Cairns' most famous patient was T.E. Lawrence, "Lawrence of Arabia", who died under his care at Bovington Camp Military Hospital following a motorcycle accident in 1935. This event profoundly affected Cairns and led to his development of the first motorcycle helmets.

Although it took some 32 years before the use of helmets was made compulsory for all motorcycle riders and pillion passengers in the United Kingdom, this is perhaps Hugh Cairns' most significant legacy.

Professor Neuhaus' presentation is one of hundreds at this year's ASC, covering all surgical specialties and aspects of surgical history and education. Nearly 2,000 delegates are expected to attend the ASC, which runs from 2 to 6 May and is being held at the Adelaide Convention Centre. The ASC program is available online at [www.surgeons.org](http://www.surgeons.org)

**Media inquiries:** Michael Barrett, Media & PR Manager - 0429 028 933  
Bridget Hooper, Media & PR Officer – 0437 008 891