



## History

## Harvey Cushing and some Australian connections: Part 2 – post World War 1

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## ABSTRACT

Part 1 of this article (see Vol 17, pp. 168–172) described the early life of Harvey Cushing and his encounters with Australian doctors, mostly in various military hospitals, in France, in World War 1. As none of the doctors he met at that time became neurosurgeons, and hence did not shape their professional development. When World War 1 ended, HC returned to a heavy schedule of operating at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital and to his university obligations. He received the Companion of the Bath from the British Government for his war services and wrote the history of US Base Hospital No. 5, which he directed during the War. Cushing's reputation as a neurosurgeon was now secure and he was ready to play an even greater part as an academic neurosurgeon, teaching students from all parts of the world and continuing his researches into cerebral tumours and the pituitary gland.

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## 1. Post world war 1 – Cushing and Hugh Cairns

Harvey Williams Cushing (HC) was the primary force in establishing the Society of Neurological Surgeons (Fig. 1) in the USA in 1920. In the same year he started William Osler's biography, which he finished in 1925 and which won the Pulitzer Prize for Biography or Autobiography in 1926. In October of that year he had two Australian connections, delivering the Cameron Prize Lectures<sup>1</sup> in Edinburgh (see *Background and biographical notes*) and meeting Hugh Cairns (*vide infra [v.i.]*) for the third time. In the lectures he describes the history of Dr Andrew Robertson Cameron, a Scot who migrated to Richmond, New South Wales (NSW), and who donated money for a lecture to a "practitioner or member of the medical profession who should be adjudged to have made some addition to practical therapeutics during the year preceding". HC used this opportunity to summarise his work on the third circulation, the hypophysis and on gliomas.

Cairns was recommended to HC by Lady Osler and Charles Sherrington and Cairns went to work in Boston, USA, on a Rockefeller Fellowship. Cairns worked at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital, as an assistant resident surgeon to HC in 1926–27. He was warned by A. Malloch that Cushing "was very hard and that he cheated at tennis and had the reputation of not giving sufficient credit to his assistants and of being a perfect beast in the operating room sometimes". There, Cairns learned to assess patients, perform vi-

sual field testing and prepare the patient in the operating room before the "chief" started the operation. Cairns wrote to his wife about seeing a little girl of eight with a brain tumour and was excited about "a rare case of cerebral aneurysm". He was surprised that "a mad woman – or rather a vegetable" regained consciousness when Cushing removed a cystic tumour from her frontal lobe. He learned to use the "electrosurgical knife", and assisted in the unsuccessful third operation on General Leonard Wood's meningioma and was unfairly blamed for his death. The death upset Cushing so much that he stopped operating for two weeks.

Relations between Cairns and HC were not always cordial because of the latter's unpredictable behaviour. Cairns was upset by the "chief's" criticism of previous assistants, "his Machiavellian attention to his reputation", his angry outbursts, public humiliation of his assistants and his lying. Cairns, however, admired HC's hard work, "amazing persistence", courage, disregard for his own personal comfort and his distress at seeing a patient die. Some lingering doubts about HC's honesty is reflected in Cairns's letters to his wife, Barbara, where he writes, "I never know what to believe of the things he tells me about cerebral surgery, though his writings are more honest than those of the average surgeon." Later it came to light that Cairns told W. C. Gibson (a student of Osler at McGill University and future Fitzpatrick lecturer to the Royal College of Physicians) that he bought a revolver to either shoot himself or HC.<sup>2</sup> Cairns later gained in confidence as seen in an incident when HC scolded an assistant for an unsteady hand and could tell that he missed a cigarette, whereupon Cairns asked whether he could also tell which brand he smoked.<sup>3</sup> There is evidence to suggest that HC liked Cairns and respected his diagnosis. Cairns described his memories of working in Boston as not unlike those of the front line

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**Fig. 1.** The 28–29 April 1922 meeting of the Society of Neurological Surgeons held in New York, USA. Upper row (left to right): Samuel C. Harvey, Harry H. Kerr, Alfred W. Adson, Howard C. Naffziger, W. Jason Mixter, Claude C. Coleman, Charles A. Dowman, Charles Bagley Jr; lower row (left to right): Alfred S. Taylor, Allen B. Kanavel, Ernest Sachs, Charles H. Frazier, Harvey Cushing, Charles A. Elsberg, Edward W. Archibold. (Published with the kind permission of the Society of Neurological Surgeons).

in France<sup>4</sup> but the two parted on good terms, HC wrote Cairns a good reference and visited him whenever he was in England.

## 2. Cushing and other Australian neurosurgeons

November 1928 was a busy month for HC, who was by then 59 years old. He published a series of addresses under the heading of “Consecratio Medici”,<sup>5</sup> and gave to the publisher Charles C Thomas the manuscript for his and Percival Bailey’s *Tumours Arising from Blood Vessels*, which became the first publication of that publisher.<sup>6</sup> He also received a visit from a young Australian surgeon, R. A. Money (Fig. 2), who aspired to be a neurosurgeon (v.i.). In a letter to his family, dated 17 November 1928,<sup>7</sup> Money wrote about his trip to Baltimore where he met W. E. Dandy, [?]H. Young and Max Brodel (medical artist) and then to Boston where he spent two weeks with HC. He wrote “I want to make a special study [of neurosurgery] – coz no-one in Sydney does much of it”. He mentions learning the preparation of the patient, instruments and surgical techniques and is grateful to HC because “he has been awfully nice to me and put the whole clinic at my disposal”.

Leonard Lindon (v.i.) of South Australia visited HC in late 1929 with the encouragement of the South Australian government. He worked with him for eight months, learning his techniques, and no doubt obtained advice about setting up a neurosurgical unit in Adelaide.<sup>8</sup> 1930 was also a busy year for HC as he was now 61 years and approaching retirement. He received many offers from numerous universities for appointments to various chairs but declined them, saw his daughter Betsy marry James Roosevelt on 6 June and visited England to give the Lister Memorial Lecture



**Fig. 2.** Rex Money c. 1935 (1897–1984). (Published with the kind permission of the estate of R. A. Money [A. Raymond]).

on “Neurohypophyseal Mechanisms from a Clinical Standpoint” in July. In the latter half of 1930 HC was visited by H. R. Dew (v.i.), the Bosch Professor of Surgery at the University of Sydney, who was interested in neurosurgery.<sup>9</sup>

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