

Margaret Boulton, 'The Apothecary and the Surgeon: Medical Responsibility and Care in Early South Australia'

*Abstract: Most early migrants to South Australia were required to pay for medical services. Some however, were able to gain access to free care through the government-funded 'colonial surgeon'. Exactly who was entitled to free medical care varied during the tenure of the first two colonial surgeons, Thomas Young Cotter and James Nash, who held the position from 1836 to 1856. Demands placed on these two men evolved rapidly during this period, due to local economic instability and because the rapidly increasing population exposed poverty-related health problems. In this study I will use the careers of Cotter and Nash to show how their responsibilities were linked to South Australia's political, economic and legal climate at the time. I will also explain the extent to which these men were influenced by existing medical principles in Britain, Europe and North America. Topics will include medical professionalisation, theories of disease causation, and the origins of medical institutions in South Australia. The study will show the extent to which health practices evolved in response to the challenging and unique nature of early South Australia.*

*Citation: Margaret Boulton is a medical historian and visiting researcher with the Discipline of Surgery at the University of Adelaide. Her research interests include institutional spaces, 19th century medical practitioners, and diseases such as epilepsy, smallpox, polio, particularly in the context of South Australia. The judges appreciate that she is well placed to provide a medically informed history of the role played by Colonial Surgeons Thomas Cotter and James Nash during the earliest years of the colony of South Australia.*

By framing her study around these two figures, Boulton is well placed to provide an engaging narrative that demonstrates how wider forces impact on the practices and attitudes of individuals at the microlevel. The judges recognise the value of examining this period of South Australia's history through a new lens, and demonstrating how the South Australian experience fits into the broader milieu of a national history.

The judges agreed that Margaret Boulton's project will strengthen, augment and promote the current understanding of, and knowledge about, early medicine and medical practices in South Australia, and will demonstrate how existing ideas about medicine were applied under specific circumstances surrounding the founding of South Australia.