

Cutts, William Henry (1828-1897)

William Henry Cutts (1828-1897), physician, was born on 25 December 1828 at Chesterfield, Derbyshire, England, youngest son of John Cutts, solicitor, and his wife Mary. He was educated at Wesley College, Sheffield, and in 1844-49 was indentured to Thomas Jones, apothecary and surgeon of Chesterfield. He then studied medicine at Edinburgh (M.D., 1851), and in that year became a licentiate of the Society of Apothecaries of London. He also studied for a short time in Paris, and from this experience remained a great admirer of the French surgeon, Auguste Nélaton (1807-1873).

Cutts arrived at Melbourne in the *Kent* in September 1852, went to the Ovens (Beechworth) goldfield and later to Bendigo, where he not only practised medicine but also pursued the profitable occupation of gold buyer for the banks. He did not like the hard life and in 1853 returned to Melbourne where he successfully practised at the west end of the city until his retirement. Kind, tolerant and friendly, Cutts gained the confidence of his patients, and in a profession beset with jealousies and quarrels enjoyed also happy relations with his colleagues. He played an increasingly active role in medical life. When the staff of the Melbourne Hospital was enlarged in 1858 he was elected honorary physician, a position he filled for seventeen years. He helped to found the Medical Society of Victoria, was appointed to its committee in 1859 and became its president in 1866. He was active also in the founding in 1865 of the Victorian Medical Benevolent Association and served as its treasurer and president. He strongly supported the publication of the *Australian Medical Gazette*, to which he was a frequent contributor. In 1879 he helped to establish the Victorian branch of the British Medical Association and in 1880-81 was its president.

Cutts's most valuable service to the community was undoubtedly as a member of the Council of the University of Melbourne (M.D., *ad eund.*, 1859), a position he held from 1858 until 1890. He served on the Medical School Committee set up by council in 1860 to control the organization of the new school which was established finally in 1862, and in 1887 he was one of the minority to disagree with the admission of women to the medical course.

Outside his medical pursuits Cutts was a magistrate and a steadfast Wesleyan Methodist. With his friend Richard Hodgson he was long associated with Wesley Church, Melbourne, giving his time, energy and professional skill without stint as a leading layman. He represented his church on the Denominational Schools Board and the Melbourne Cemetery Board. He was honorary medical officer at the South Carlton Refuge, served on the royal commission on education in 1882, and at one stage thought of entering politics but was dissuaded by friends who thought him too sensitive.

Cutts married in 1857 Jane Thorpe and they had a large family. After her death he married in 1895 Isabella Rathie, who had trained at the Royal Edinburgh Infirmary, acted as sister in Hobart and in January 1890 became matron at the Melbourne Hospital, where she established organized nurse training. On a visit to England, and soon after arrival in London, Cutts died on 3 July 1897.

Last updated 10 February 2025

Source: Frank Forster, Australian Dictionary of Biography, Vol.3, 1969.