By Ross I Jones

‘In making our introductory salaam before the public, we beg to congratulate the Melbourne Medical School on the first issue of its journal.’ So read the opening line of the first editorial of Speculum in July 1884.

Speculum proved to be remarkably resilient even though, when a centenarian, the magazine was renovated with a succession of name changes (for example Gubernaculum from 1986-9). Did the founders of the Medical Students’ Society (MSS) magazine foresee its almost continuous publication for over a century? On only a handful of occasions have either financial crashes, censorship or a lack of contributions from the student body stopped the presses, giving us a remarkable insight into student and faculty life over most of the life of the medical school.

After two decades of stagnation after its foundation, the medical school began to flourish in the 1880s, certainly enough to support a student’s magazine, and Speculum was the efflorescence of this growth. As the maiden editorial in 1884 chimed, ‘In the whole University are some 390 students on the roll; of these 190, or nearly one half, are medicals.’ The foundation of Speculum was contemporaneous with the first publications of student magazines at major northern hemisphere universities such as Harvard, Yale and Princeton—although Speculum seems to be the only publication that was exclusively medical.

Concomitantly, Speculum also began its long career as a forum for the complaints of the student body. In reality, it was often the main vent through which student dissatisfaction exploded. For example, in 1885 the editors began what was to be a long-running assault on the competence of the board of the Melbourne Hospital as well as the University Council. This culminated in 1886 when the committee of the Medical Students’ Society was granted an interview with the Premier of Victoria in order to demand a greater share of university income on the basis that they made up half the number of students,
The Medical School was roundly castigated, in the article entitled ‘The Fifth Year Fiasco’, for failing the whole of the final year.

This cartoon, which appeared in Speculum in May 1933 was the work of John Parry who was then in his second year of the medical course. When Parry entered medicine he already had a diploma of architecture and had been working with an architectural firm for a couple of years. He graduated MBBS in 1937 but his medical career and life were cut short by his early death in 1940, from progressive muscular atrophy.
A classic skeleton cover by an unknown artist from the early 1930s.

This cover dates from 1980, one of the latest issues of Speculum.

This eerie image of the old Medical School building was published to celebrate our 100th anniversary in 1962.

Humorous cartoons, a hallmark of Speculum’s editorial policy, display the humour of the day. This dates from the August 1943 issue.
Theatre Night, [was] famous for the quantities of ginger-ale consumed by the “gods”