

# Speculum

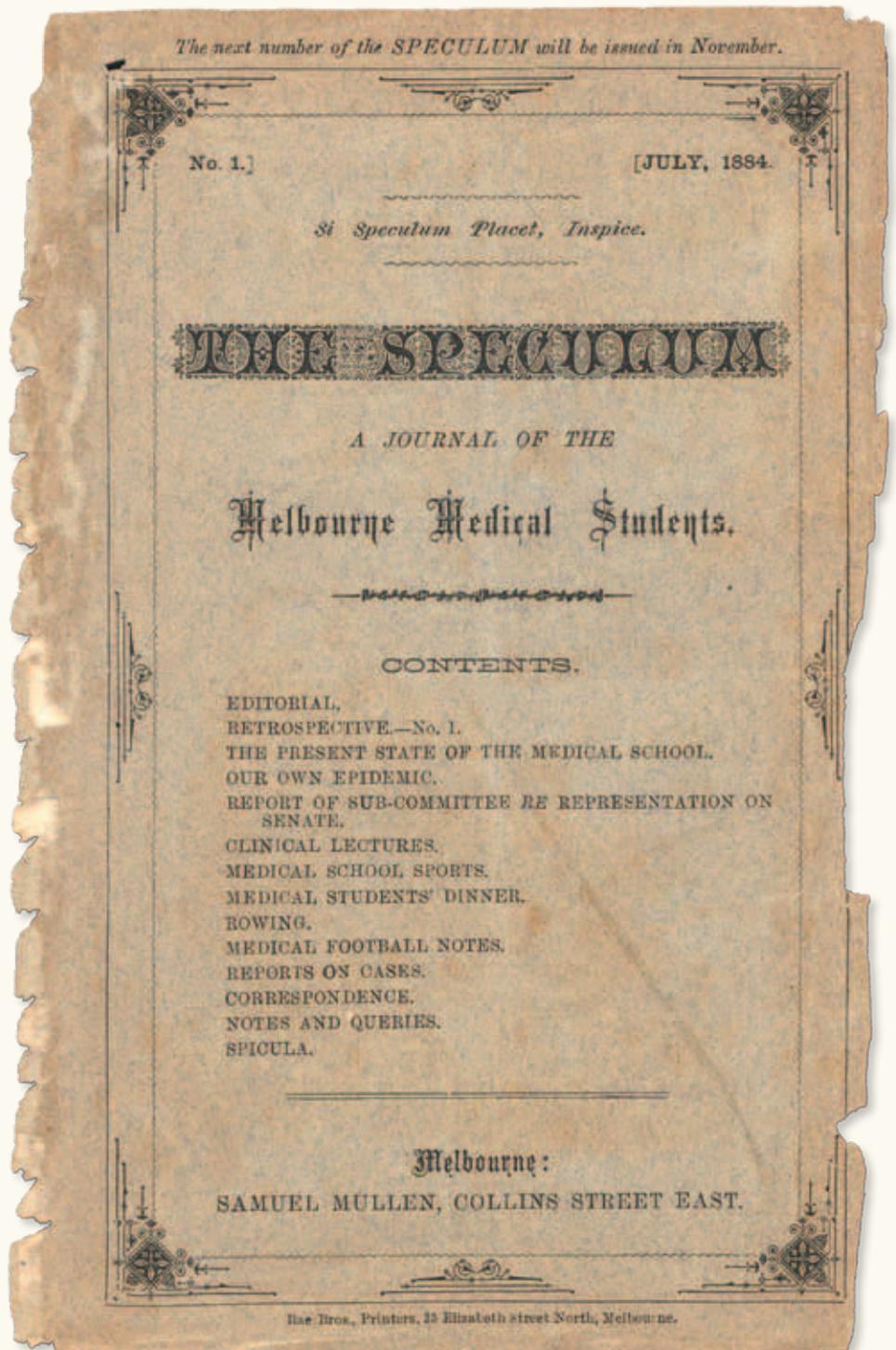
By Ross L Jones

'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.

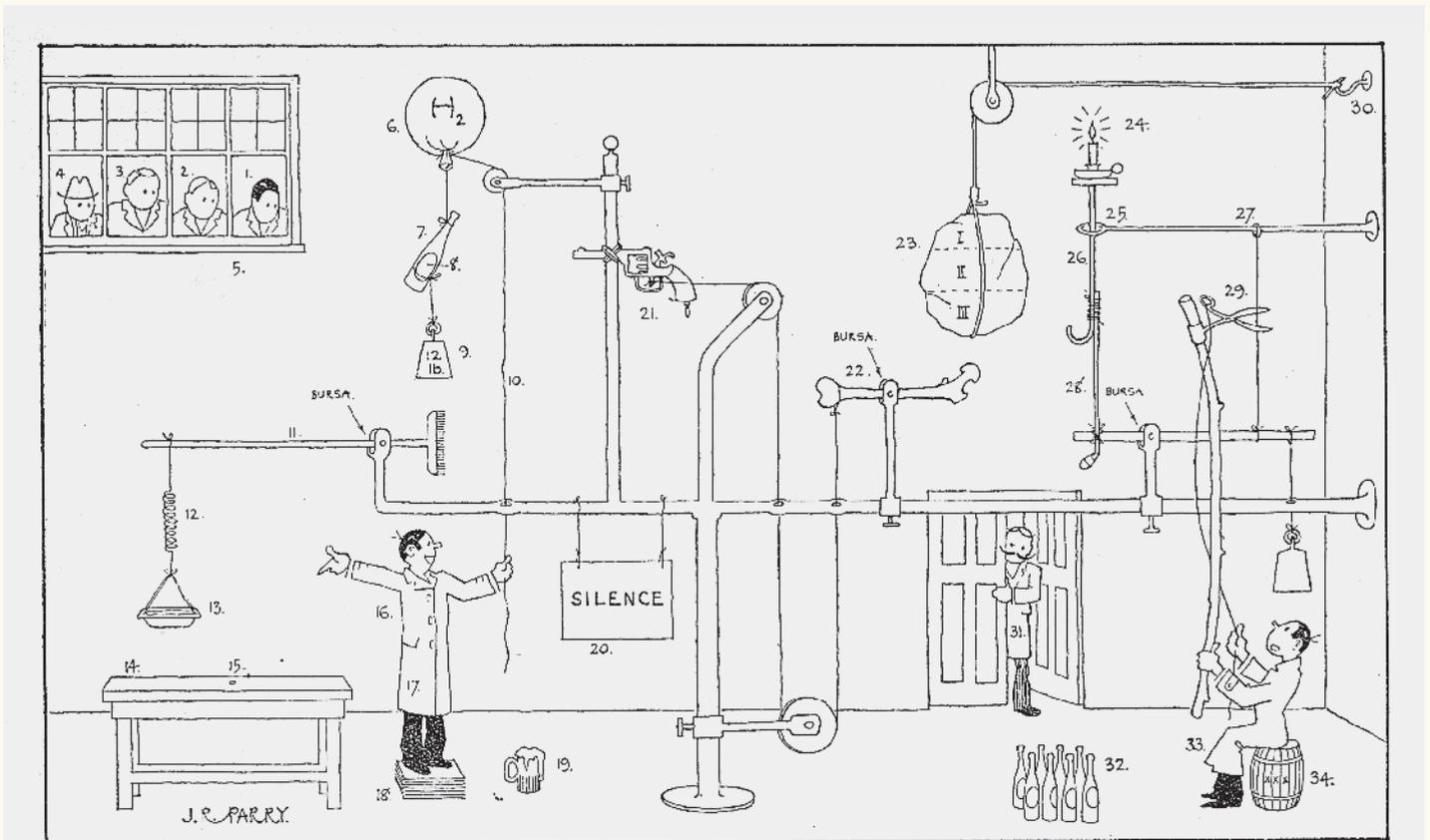
*Speculum* proved to be remarkably resilient even though, when a centenarian, the magazine was renovated with a succession of name changes (for example *Gubernaculum* from 1986-9). Did the founders of the Medical Students' Society (MSS) magazine foresee its almost continuous publication for over a century? 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



APPARATUS VIBRANS DISSECTIONIS  
(O.T. Mechanical Rattling Machine for Students)

- |                                              |                                  |                                                             |                                      |
|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Professor iratus (sed benevolens).        | 9. Moles pendens (atque gravis). | 19. Amicus studiosi—semper causa jubilationis.              | 27. Foramen rotundum.                |
| 2. Lector senior tolerans.                   | 10. Ramus communicans.           | 20. Exhortatio.                                             | 28. Scipio golfi.                    |
| 3. Lector Stewarti Fordi automobili vibrans. | 11. Brumum Kennedii.             | 21. Revolvere revolvans.                                    | 29. Forfex domestica.                |
| 4. Prestoneus jocosus.                       | 12. Trichina spiralis.           | 22. Magnum Bonum.                                           | 30. Hamatum murale.                  |
| 5. Fenestra quadrata.                        | 13. Dishum palpitans.            | 23. Petrus Galliae (O.T. Gaul Stone—divisa in partes tres). | 31. Fallopius antiquus. (Dies Irae). |
| 6. Vesica supportans.                        | 14. Mensa cadaveris.             | 24. Lux vomica.                                             | 32. Ampullae reservatae.             |
| 7. Ampulla vitrea (Fosteri).                 | 15. Umbilicus mensae.            | 25. Foramen ovale.                                          | 33. Studiosus operans.               |
| 8. Inscriptio ovalis.                        | 16. Studiosus regulans.          | 26. Scipio ambulans.                                        | 34. Niner rotundum (Nortoni).        |
|                                              | 17. Toga alba.                   |                                                             |                                      |
|                                              | 18. Accumulatio Speculorum.      |                                                             |                                      |

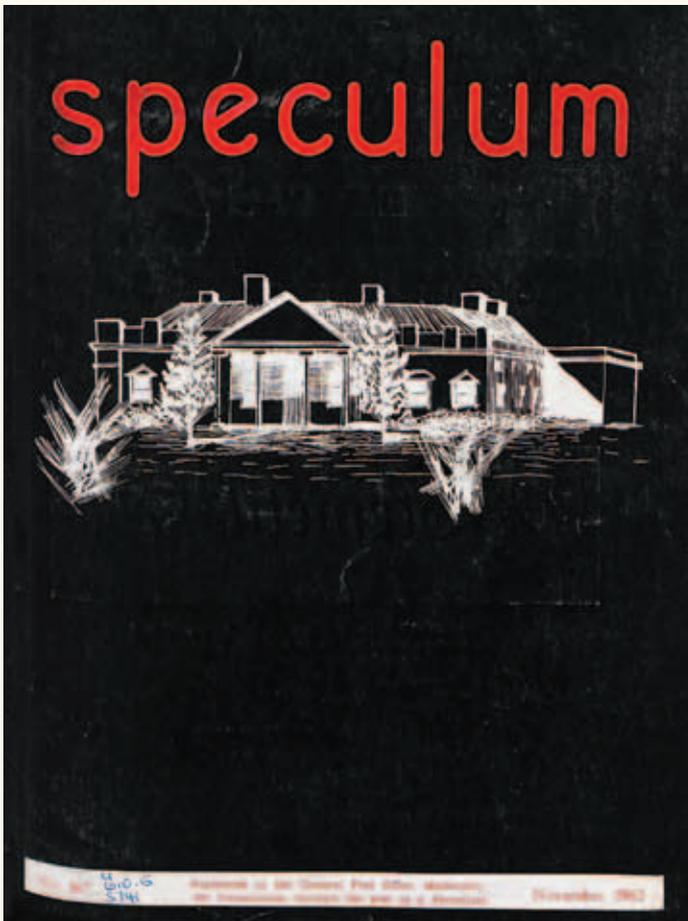
This cartoon, which appeared in Speculum in May 1933 was the work of John Parry who was then in his second year of the medical course. When Parry entered medicine he already had a diploma of architecture and had been working with an architectural firm for a couple of years. He graduated MBBS in 1937 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”

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and yet received less than one-ninth of the government grant. In the same volume of *Speculum*, in the first of a number of ongoing, if irregular, complaints, the medical school was roundly castigated, in the article entitled ‘The Fifth Year Fiasco’, for failing the whole of the final year. The magazine blamed not the incompetence of the students but rather the ‘ambiguity and indefiniteness of the majority’ of the questions in the final examinations!

*Speculum* also provides a window into the private life of those early medical students, including the living environments of the many students who boarded in the Victorian terrace houses in Parkville. By 1925, *Speculum* was complaining about ‘those ugly mid-Victorian houses, those tiny back yards, those stained ceilings, the mud-coloured wallpapers, with white bows and baskets of puce roses, the woodwork painted an irrelevant green... [and] the dining rooms have red wall-paper, and are decorated with jardinières of that drearily respectable vegetable, the aspidistra.’

Similarly, the varied recreational life of the medical students is captured in its pages. On the thirtieth anniversary of the foundation of the MSS *Speculum* reminisced that:

socially, its activities were legion. Of these possibly the palm was taken by our annual procession, ending [at] the London Tavern. Wondrous and varied were the costumes displayed, and great were the preparations, but, more wonderful still, the lorries on which they passed. Then came Theatre Night, famous for the quantities of ginger-ale consumed by the “gods;” Smoke Night, Hare and Hounds Dinner, Football match at the Epileptic Colony, and so on.... Lastly—I had almost forgotten—three copies of the “*Speculum*” per annum were thrown in.’

Significant breakthroughs in medical research as well as changes in clinical practice were also recorded in *Speculum*’s pages. It noted,

for example, the introduction of asepsis into the operating theatres. As such, we read in *Speculum* in 1892 that during an operation on a larynx at the Melbourne Hospital by the famous colonial surgeon Sir Thomas Fitzgerald there were ‘forty onlookers present ... two sisters and a Homeopath amongst them’, but, by 1897, the editorial was commenting that it was ‘dreadful to think’ how recently ‘septic diseases were still rife in our hospitals’. As a consequence of the Listerian revolution, the magazine enthused, ‘now-a-days, one death in 0, one in 40, one in 50 is too many’.

*Speculum* also charted the medical school’s response to developments in medicine through reforms in the curriculum—though not always in complimentary tones. Indeed, it heralded the arrival of germ theory with a distinct warning:

You, Professors devoted to science,  
And prone to be ever in front,  
Who, with such a rare self-reliance,  
Continue for microbes to hunt—  
...

We certainly think ‘twould be better,  
If, ere you broke further ground,  
You first tried to foil and to fetter  
The germs you have already found.’

It is difficult to think of any comparable institution with such a rich source of material with which to re-create its history and character. *Speculum* is a remarkable asset for the Melbourne medical community. Surely the founders of the magazine have much to be proud of.

Ross Jones is ARC Fellow, Department of History, University of Sydney and author of *Humanity’s Mirror: 150 Years of Anatomy in Melbourne*.

### Speculum Copyright... Calling All Authors

A part of the commemorative activities focusing on the 150th anniversary of the Melbourne Medical School the Faculty is underwriting a project to make digital copies of significant collections of relevant publications held by the University. In addition to contributing to the security of these collections this will also enable improved access to the publications for researchers and, hopefully, general access on the University’s website. Publications in this program include the *Australian Medical Journal*, published by the Victorian Medical Society and the medical student’s magazine, *Speculum*.

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