

Ambrose Merton On-Line

The publication which eventually carried the name *Letters to Ambrose Merton* was founded by Gillian Bennett in 1986 as *Forum*. After four issues the name was changed to *Dear Mr Thoms...* When eventually the newsletter becoming an officially registered periodical, by obtaining an ISSN number, 1357-4787, it was renamed *Letters to Ambrose Merton*. By this time I had begun to share the editing with Gillian, and later she handed over responsibility to David Cornwell and myself. We continued to edit it until the final issue published in 2002.

Forum and the early issues of *Dear Mr Thoms...* were photocopied sheets stapled together. Later issues of *Dear Mr Thoms...* and all of *Letters to Ambrose Merton* were produced by computer based word processing. This technological advance probably made the periodical easier to handle and to read. However, the growth in the use of computers was associated with an enormous increase in the use of the internet. This was a major contributor to the death of *Letters to Ambrose Merton*. As explained in a valedictory editorial: "Most of our contributions in recent years have been submitted by e-mail and e-mail communications has become a regular topic".

The contents of the newsletter varied a great deal. "Contemporary folklore" would be the most appropriate general description, although there were occasional contributions on traditional lore. Urban legend is probably the most widely known and studied form of contemporary folklore, but humour, superstition, photocopylore and commercial popular culture were also included.

Only a small number of libraries subscribed to the newsletter, which means that the contents are very difficult for most people, other than original subscribers, to access. Accordingly, it was decided to make some of the contents available on the internet. It has not been feasible to reproduce all of the content, some of which in any case was possibly of only ephemeral interest.

The site address is: <http://ambrosemerton.org>.

It is intended to gradually build up the content of this site. Initially, selection has been based largely on availability, electronic versions of some entries having been lost. Among the many topics already available are The Vanishing Hitchhiker, Hanging the Monkey, The Boyfriend's Death, Folk Initialese and Built on Seven Hills.

Sandy Hobbs
sandy.hobbs@uws.ac.uk