

# In Memoriam - Heinz Joss

by Hans Kordetzky on behalf of all collectors

**Heinz Joss**, born 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1929, studied architecture at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich. For a long time he was a practising architect in Sweden before returning to Zurich in 1961 to take over the establishment and management of a Research & Development office for the Swiss construction industry. During the last ten years of his professional career, he devoted himself to the interface between language and terminology.

He was also a lecturer at the University for Design in Ulm (D). The university was founded in 1953 by Inge Aicher-Scholl, Otl Aicher, Max Bill and others in Ulm. It was in operation until 1968 and was considered the most important international design university after the Bauhaus-University in Weimar.

Heinz Joss was always a collector. As a teenager he collected stamps until he realised that they were increasingly becoming speculative items. His next collecting passion was watches. But in the long run they became too expensive to collect.

By coincidence he finally lost his collecting heart to slide rules. In 1994 he bought a slide rule for two francs at a flea market because it looked completely different from the one he had worked with all his life. This opened his eyes to the many differences in slide rules. An article in a German collector's magazine and his love of mathematics did the rest. Suddenly he only had eyes for slide rules at flea markets.



Overtime he amassed a vast collection of linear slide rules, circular slide rules, slide rule drums, slide rule watches, etc. He was particularly interested in the Swiss manufacturers.

Heinz Joss not only collected slide rules but he also did research. He tried to discover the people or companies who developed certain slide rules and their associated social history.

This is reflected in the many lectures he gave at collectors' meetings. But he also published many reports in trade journals, daily newspapers and via the Internet.

Heinz Joss was a member of The Oughtred Society (OS), the Slide Rule Collectors Group (RST), the UK Slide Rule Circle (UKSRC) and the Collector's Club of Historical Office Machines Switzerland (SHBS). For Heinz attending meetings of these groups was like being part of a big family where everyone spoke the same language. Collectors could chat about their common hobby and try to complete their own collection through bartering. If anyone needed help with a slide rule he was always willing to assist and offer guidance.

The focus of the many meetings was not exclusively slide rules. They were also social gatherings where every possible topic under the sun was discussed and a fine meal enjoyed. This led to many friendships being formed and even to going on joint holidays.

The highlight was naturally organising and staging the International Collectors Meeting, the IM1998, in Huttwil. It took a lot of fortitude and strength - not forgetting an extraordinary amount of hard work.

Also outstanding were the two "350 Years of the Slide Rule" exhibitions held in the secondary school in Köniz and in the Regensdorf local museum Spycher.

His last major project was co-editing the book: "Kein Geschenk für den Führer". Christine Holub recorded the lifetime memories of Curt Herzstark. With the help of Ute and Bernd Schröder and Heinz Joss she published them. It includes a biography of the inventor of the CURTA, the world's smallest mechanical calculator and an unparalleled mechanical masterpiece.

In recent years Heinz Joss took things a little easier. Although he stayed mentally sharp his physical strength continued to decline. All things considered Heinz Joss, who died on May 17<sup>th</sup> 2019 at the age of almost 90, will probably be best remembered as the Swiss grandmaster of the Worshipful Company of Slide Rule Collectors.