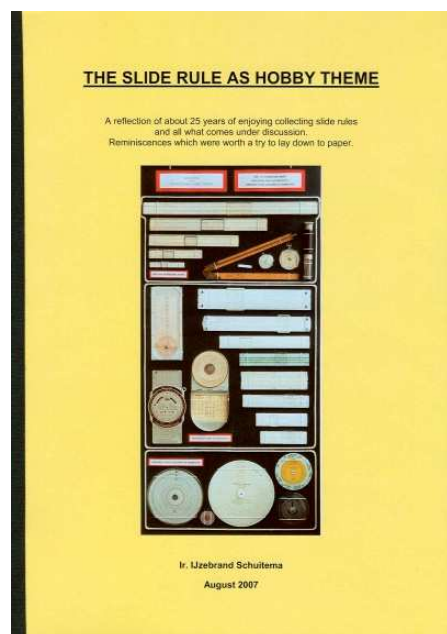


# My Collection Has A New Home

*IJzebrand Schuitema*

It was in the early 1980's that I bought a slide rule at a flea market in Berlin. Having paid very little for my find, the original idea was to resell it when I was back in Holland and use the profit to finance my existing hobbies. However, back home the combination of scales intrigued me so much I decided to keep the slide rule. That was the start of a new hobby and a new collection.



Since then a hive of activity related to the theme of slide rule collecting has spanned more than 25 years. I wrote about my experiences in one of my books *"The Slide Rule As Hobby Theme"*, subtitled: *"A reflection of about 25 years of enjoying collecting slide rules and all what comes under discussion. Reminiscences which were worth a try to lay down on paper"*.

When anyone who is absorbed with a hobby for so long reaches a respectable age the inevitable question arises: *"What will happen to my collection when I am no longer around?"* In my case the question was even more pertinent because of the size of my collection and its related scope and variety. Unique in the world it consists of linear and round slide rules, pocket watch slide rules, side rule drums and cylinders, slide charts, production tools, filmstrips for printing scales, typeset printing

blocks, instructions for use, books, folders, photographs, factory archives, patents, training materials, etc, etc. Recognising this, my decision was to keep everything together and to resist selling off parts to interested parties. Believing my collection represented something of great cultural and scientific value, I wanted it to remain intact and an everlasting easily available source for anyone wishing to undertake any related historical, scientific or technical research. The history of the slide rule roughly covers the period from 1600 to the end of the 1900's. For more than three and half centuries the slide rule had a strong and important social influence. When viewed in its entirety, my collection largely reflects these influences.

But this raised another question: *"How to achieve the goal of keeping the collection together but at the same time make sure the contents stay accessible?"* The first and most logical avenue worth exploring was to see if a suitable museum could be found for my collection. To



To test the water I surveyed 40 of the approximate 1200 registered museums in The

Netherlands. The answers to 10 questions would give me an insight into the perception of Dutch museums for a slide rule collection. 27 of the 40 museums I contacted replied. The results were, on the whole, sadly disappointing. There was little inherent knowledge over the historical, technical, scientific and associated social aspects and none of them had a collecting strategy that covered the slide rule. I visited various important museums and spoke with their directors. This just confirmed the answers and views I already had. The reaction to my invitation to eight of the more promising museums to view the collection at my home was also disappointing. Two respectively declined, four ignored the invitation and the two that took the trouble to visit me, let me know after their visits that they saw no possibility for helping me achieve my objective.



So was that the end or were there other possibilities? I had had informal contact with a private individual who used to manufacture bricks. Brick production had stopped and the individual had plans to turn his old factory into an industrial museum. Initial discussions with him went very well and it started to look like the whole of my collection would be the main exhibit in one of his factory halls. Despite this I started to get cold feet and think it might fail. It was, after all, a very eccentric idea to start a new museum in Delfzijl and the owner was already over 65 years old. Would the museum ever gain legitimacy and enough visitors to financially survive? So I had my doubts about committing my whole collection to such a new museum and I eventually decided against the idea. My doubts were justified. Within two years the individual decided to abandon his plans for a museum.

Another initiative was to entrust my whole collection to the "Kromhout Werf" museum in Amsterdam. A collector friend of mine sits on the governing body of the museum and they initially believed there were distinct possibilities. However, in the end they had to reject the idea because the future of their museum was in some doubt because the land where the museum was located had been rezoned. So also this possibility looked doomed to fail.

Then unexpectedly the solution came in the post. Several years ago, as part of a meeting organised by the German slide rule collectors club, I had visited the "Arithmeum" museum in Bonn, Germany. I used my visit to donate copies of my first two books to the museum's library. In this way the museum was not only aware of my collection but also knew me personally. A collector friend of mine during a later visit to the museum mentioned to the director that I was looking for a good home for my collection. Subsequently, in 2007, I received a letter from the "Arithmeum". As part of the University of



Bonn, the museum was interested in adopting my whole collection, managing the collection, making it accessible to researchers either on location or via the digital highway and based on different themes, to have the collection on display. It is impossible to imagine a nicer letter. Shortly afterwards the museum Director and a Professor from the University followed up their letter with a visit to view my collection and discuss its transfer. During the discussions we were able to agree on all the associated organisational aspects. The only unresolved point was the financial side. My collection is worth a considerable amount of money. Unfortunately the museum had no means by which they could buy my collection. Although the financial side was obviously important to me, the more essential aspect was finding a suitable home for my collection, how it would be organised and ensuring it remained accessible to others.

For me, I knew that the transfer of my collection was now a sure thing. However, I tried all sorts of ways to get the transfer privately sponsored by approaching companies and various funds. None of my many initiatives led to anything.



In contrast, the University of Bonn looked for an alternative way to compensate me. What they came up with is truly special. In the 1990's the University started issuing special medals. The short explanatory text as drawn up by the University is as follows:

### **Wolfgang-Paul-Medaille der Rheinischen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn**

Die Wolfgang-Paul Medaille wurde unter dem Rektorat von Professor Max Huber (1992-1997) ins Leben gerufen. Sie soll an den weltweit bekannten Physiker und Nobelpreisträger Wolfgang Paul, der seit 1952 ordentlicher Professor an der Universität Bonn war, erinnern. Sie wird sowohl Wissenschaftler als auch an Personen verliehen, die sich in ideeller oder materieller Weise um die Universität Bonn besonders verdient gemacht haben. Einer der bekanntesten Träger der Wolfgang-Paul-Medaille ist der ehemalige deutsche Bundeskanzler Dr. Helmut Kohl.



The university decided to award me this medal.

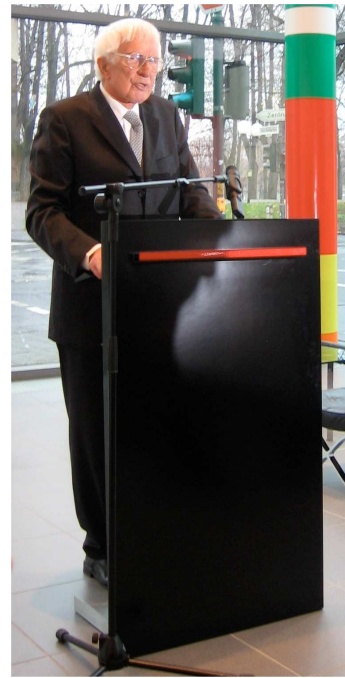


I consider this a great honour, not only for me personally but also a sign of recognition that the slide rule for approximately four centuries had a significant cultural, social, scientific and technical calculating aid impact.



The medal ceremony and associated reception took place in Bonn on December 2<sup>nd</sup> 2008. The ceremony and reception made a big impression on me. It will remain a fond and lasting memory for many years to come.





I assume the organisational aspects associated with the transfer and accessibility of my collection will probably take at least a couple of years to complete. I hope and expect to be significantly involved in the transfer. In this way I can ensure that the results will be seen as optimal by all who need to reference any of the items for private research projects.

As a follow-on activity I will try, in parallel, to get the UNESCO, as part of their policy to compile new lists of non-material items of "world heritage" importance, to get the theme "*calculating with the help of a slide rule*", added to one of their lists. If I succeed, then the provenance of the slide rule as a protected item of cultural importance, with the museum "Arithmeum" in Bonn as its most important global centre, is guaranteed for time everlasting. I have already written to UNESCO and I await their reply.

With this account I hope to get readers and collectors thinking about what information, documents, etc they have in their collections that is not yet administered by the "Arithmeum". Then perhaps in correspondence or e-mail with the museum, you may decide to offer it to the museum so that it becomes the most important global centre for finding everything out about the history of the slide rule.

Let this aim become an objective for all of us – that is my wish.



rechnen einst und heute