

e-Musing 4.

We have recently returned from our semi-annual visit to my son who is living and working in New York, and otherwise enjoying a transatlantic break. Apart from the pleasure of seeing him, these visits also give me an opportunity to buy a few slide rules from the weekly flea market that features quite strongly in the advertising literature found in every hotel. The *"Hell's Kitchen"* on West 39th Street between 9th and 10th Avenue was nothing like as busy as the adverts made it out to be, in fact on initial experience I was convinced it was going to be a wasted journey. However there were slide rules available, and I was able to buy examples new to my collection. The choice was not as good as the previous two trips, and the prices had also risen – what's new? It is also interesting to compare the rules I have bought on our three trips to date:

Maker	2002	2003	2005	Total rules	%
Accumath	2	1	0	3	13
K & E	0	2	0	2	9
Lawrence	0	0	2	2	9
Pickett	4	1	2	7	31
Post	1	0	0	1	4
Russian (!!)	2	0	0	2	9
Sterling	1	0	0	1	4
Sun-Hemmi	0	1	0	1	4
Miscellaneous	0	2	2	4	17
Total rules	10	7	6	23	100
Average \$ per rule	\$6	\$12	\$16		

The "Miscellaneous" entry covers a slide rule tie-pin on each of the two years, and this year a slide rule watch bought as a small joke for my son to wear while his posh watch is repaired - that will teach him to mock my hobby! Without a doubt, Pickett rules – ha, ha – and the "king" of American rules, K&E is a rarity. I have not bought every slide rule I have seen, I cheerfully turn down anything that is scruffy e.g. a K&E 4058W with a cigarette burn on it, and Picketts already in my collection. My impression is that American collectors are not flocking to this Flea Market to buy the slide rules – great as far as I am concerned. The conversation about the rule is pretty similar on both sides of the Atlantic: *"Do you know what it is?"*; *"Gosh, I used to use one at school/college ...!"*; *"Math(s) has never been the same since we started using calculators"*. The (s) reflects the different way we refer to this subject on opposite sides of the pond, and generally you can expect the same very friendly and slightly nostalgic discussion wherever you are.

The general availability of rules is pretty much as shown above – between three and four Picketts in every ten rules seen, and a variety of all other makers, each in ones and two's. American collectors may well curl their lips at buying Lawrence slide rules, however one was an "Engineering Instruments" variant, and the second carried the name "Nobema", which is itself interesting – can anyone tell me more about who or what "Nobema" was or were?



The image is from *"Dennert & Pape, ARISTO, 1872 – 1978"* edited by Klaus Kühn and Karl Kleine, and is one of the pictures from the 1972 D&P brochure: *"100 years ARISTO Slide Rules"*. It shows a young lady inspector checking Aristo Studio slide rules at the end of the production process. Colour images involving "people and slide rules" are fairly unusual, most images we see are monochrome.

Wishing you all a very Happy Xmas and a healthy, peaceful and prosperous New Year for 2006!

The whole vexed subject of value and rarity, which follows on from the above, is I guess one to steer clear of. However, nothing ventured, nothing gained, let us ask some hypothetical questions and see what answers might appear. When you buy a slide rule from, say, e-Bay, what makes you happy to pay the price you finally do? Do you think in terms of the numbers (rarity) of the particular model which were made? Do you think of it as an investment (value)? Over what period will you have to keep it to make a profit? Do you simply think of adding a particular missing example to your collection? Based on these suggestions my "Nobema" rule is very rare and I got a bargain. Or is it still just a cheap and cheerful Lawrence with a different name stamped on it? Anyone care to comment?