

OTTO RENIER SNEL AMPS 1937 – 2022



Otto was born on 7th December 1937 in Tilburg, Noord-Brabant in the Nazi occupied Netherlands. He had many poignant childhood memories of growing up in those war years. Although it was forbidden, he listened to the BBC Dutch Service on his crystal set radio. In 1952 his father decided there was no future for the family in Holland, so they emigrated to South Africa. There at age 15, he took a job with a Dutch Reformed Church film unit. Moving on, he joined 'Film Services', the South African Government's Department of Education, Arts and Sciences film unit. Otto's first credit was as recordist on 'Donker Africa' in 1957.

When the film finished, his father persuaded him to study geology. Shortly before graduation he applied for a position in the sound department at Killarney Film Studios. There he recorded four feature films. During which time he met, and fell in love with Sui (Sue). They decided to get married, but that was prohibited under South Africa's apartheid laws, so in 1962 they emigrated to Britain. He secured a job at the BBC where he was able to join ACTT. The possession of a union card allowed him to take up the offer of a placement in the sound department at Pinewood Studios. He started as an Assistant Dubbing Mixer, and worked his way up to senior Re-Recording Mixer in Theatre 6 and latterly Theatre 2. His credits amount to over a hundred and fifty films and television series. Many of the junior staff (including me) were grateful for his helpful encouragement. Always a keen photographer, Otto amassed a collection of excellent black and white shots of Pinewood staff at various locations around the studio. I have them archived for posterity.

Many of us at Pinewood remember Otto spending his lunch hours engrossed in the Financial Times and his folder of graphs. He assiduously plotted share movements daily to guide his investments, making good use of his geological knowledge. Another sideline was importing South African wine, which many of his colleagues enjoyed. The bottles stored behind the screen in Theatre 6 sometimes produced strange clinking sounds during the mix! He cultivated a garden outside the theatre with a rare apple tree grown from seed. The studio cats and kittens could rely on him for food and comfort.

Throughout his life, Otto passionately absorbed a comprehensive knowledge of sound recording and reproduction technology. This information guided his choices of high quality home sound equipment to enjoy his eclectic collection of music.

Otto retired from Pinewood in 1999 and continued with his geological mining and oil interests. He and Sue spent regular holidays with family in South Africa and Australia.

Following a couple of serious heart attacks in September this year, Otto was admitted to hospital where multiple complications were diagnosed, including cancer of the bone marrow. He took the brave and difficult decision to terminate all treatments and was transferred to a hospice for end of life care. He passed away peacefully overnight on the 18th December 2022, ten days after his 85th birthday.

Otto was a memorable character in the British film industry. Always generous to a fault, he unselfishly donated to many worthy charities. His niece Monica kept us up to date with Otto's tragic failing health. Condolences have poured in from many friends and colleagues who have had the good fortune to have known Otto.

He is survived by his wife Sue, and an extended family across three continents.

Graham V. Hartstone AMPS FBKS