

OBITUARY HELMUT SORG

On 16th July 2020 Helmut Sorg, the long-serving managing partner of Beteiligungen Sorg GmbH, died unexpectedly at the age of 80. Helmut, a member of the fourth generation of the family, was still at the helm of the family business, working together with his son Alexander and his brother Karl-Heinz.

As a consequence of post war difficulties in East Germany Helmut left the family home in Breitenbach in the state of Thuringia at the age of 14 and moved to the west to live with his uncle in Speyer. After graduating from high school, he went to the renowned technical university at Aachen to study industrial furnace and heating technology. His passion for and commitment to glass furnace technology was already evident in his early years. Helmut spent most of his school and semester holidays working in the family business.

He graduated from Aachen at the age of 24 and began working full-time for Nikolaus Sorg in 1964. The company had moved to West Germany in 1950 following the second world war and was still re-establishing itself.

From the start Helmut's intent was the opening of the world market for plant engineering. He knew that the key to success lay with the application of the most modern technology, the main focus of his life as a dedicated engineer.

In 1978 he initiated the creation of a single technical department within the Company and assumed responsibility for, amongst other things, all technological and development matters. This move formed the basis for the subsequent and lasting success of Sorg as one of the leading suppliers to the glass industry worldwide.

Initially he focussed on the end-fired regenerative furnace and pushed for the development of increasingly larger furnaces of this type. At the same time, he was able to find customers who were ready to accept the accompanying technical challenges. This led to the industry-wide replacement of antiquated cross-fired furnaces by the modern end-fired technology.

Helmut's drive resulted in the successful sale of these modern furnaces in Europe. He won many new customers in the core markets of Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, France, Spain, and Portugal. Furthermore, he opened markets outside Europe, for example on the American and African continents.

During this period Helmut also promoted the development of the VSM[®] all-electric furnace design and the vertical U-flame furnace, which was of great significance for the automatic production of stemware. At the time this was an important area of business for the Company. At the beginning of the 1980s he formed a company destined to produce tableware, the American Stemware Corp. in Greensville, PA. USA. One reason for this step was to demonstrate the suitability of the VSM[®] all-electric furnace for the production of highest quality lead crystal glass. He was also responsible for the development of the LoNOx[®] Melter, designed to give a significant reduction in NO_x emissions. Towards the end of the 1990s Helmut gained the contract from an important customer to build the largest Oxy-fuel Melter in Europe. Such projects exemplified Sorg's leading role in the development and design of innovative energy-efficient and low emission glass melting furnaces. Many of his ideas were the basis of other developments that subsequently resulted in patents that bore his name.

His business acumen was evident in the development of the batch plant sector. At his instigation the company took over EME in Erkelenz in 1987. Under his management this company has become a renowned supplier to the glass industry

Helmut was also closely involved in the development of the installation and service operation. He was able to assist Sorg Feuerungsbau und Service, founded in 1974, in the acquisition of contracts in various parts of the world. One year after the fall of the Berlin wall he was able to re-form Glasofenbau Leipzig, a small service company with its roots in the Sorg family business prior to the second world war. Long before the opening of the EU internal market Helmut established co-operative arrangements with companies in Eastern Europe for the supply of steelwork and the provision of services.

The development of the EU internal market led him to form SKS GmbH to combine all service activities of the Sorg Group. He also instigated the recent formation of Siam Furnace Construction in Thailand, thus completing the arrangements for the provision of furnace building services outside of the EU.

Helmut initiated Sorg's successful entry into the flat glass sector through a co-operation which led to the acquisition of ghs GmbH, a specialist consultant to the float industry. The Company's competence in the float industry is demonstrated by the excellent results achieved.

In recent years Helmut focussed on the development of forward-looking, low emission melting concepts. In 2012 the first batch preheater was commissioned as part of the new "Batch3" concept. Under his aegis the Company has developed an innovative, heavily electrically heated, horizontal furnace, now being introduced into the market under the name CLEAN Melter®.

Helmut Sorg's successes were the result of his purposefulness, his vision and his competence. However, of equal importance were his amenable personal qualities that allowed him to establish excellent social contact with many customers. He was highly respected by the staff of the SORG Group companies, who valued his straightforwardness, fairness and generosity.

His legacy as a person and as a Managing Partner of the Sorg Group is shown by his close relationship with employees and a company well-placed for the future.