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NEUROLOGICAL STAMP

Karl Friedrich Gauss (1777-1855)

Gauss came from a German peasant background. By the age of 3 he was able to correct his father's calculations when he heard him working out the wages for his labourers. At the age of 10 he astonished his teacher by discovering for himself the formula for the sum of an arithmetical progression. As a result of this mathematical precocity the Duke of Brunswick paid for Gauss to attend University and continued to support him until his death in 1806. After this Gauss accepted the directorship of the Observatory of Göttingen and he remained rector there for the rest of his life, only rarely leaving Göttingen. He also had a great linguistic ability and was able to teach himself fluent Russian in under two years.

His contribution to mathematics was profound but he had a reluctance to publish his discoveries. His interest was not confined to pure mathematics and he made contributions to many areas of applied mathematics and mathematical physics. By introducing what is now known as the Gaussian error curve, he showed how probability could be represented by a bell shaped curve, commonly called the normal distribution curve, which is basic to the description of statistically distributed data. His interest in mathematical astronomy resulted in many valuable innovations and he also made improvements in the design of astronomical instruments in use at his laboratory. His work transformed mathematics and he is generally

considered to be, with Newton and Archimedes, one of the greatest mathematicians of all time. The cgs unit of magnetic flux density is named in his honour. Soon after his death coins were struck in his honour.

He was honoured philatelically by the German Federal Republic on the centenary of his death in 1955 (Stanley Gibbons No 1130, Scott No 725).

L F HAAS