

April 24, 2003

Norbert Schappacher, Technische Universität Darmstadt

Kurt Heegner - an outsider in number theory

In 1952, the Berlin radio engineer Kurt Heegner published an article in *Mathematische Zeitschrift* solving Gauss's Class Number Problem, i.e., one of the outstanding challenges that C.F. Gauss had put forward in his seminal book *Disquisitiones Arithmeticae* of 1801. But the professional mathematicians failed to accept his solution. It was only after Heegner's death that his proof was recognized as such. And since then, the idea of so-called "Heegner points" has developed into the most successful attack to date on the famous Conjecture of Birch and Swinnerton-Dyer.

The talk will present some new material on Heegner's life and mathematical work, and give a survey of the mathematics around "Heegner points". More generally, the lecture will be an occasion to reflect on the influence of non-professional authors in modern mathematics, of which Heegner is not the only example, even if there are not many.