

# Ludolph Van Ceulen

**Born:** 28 Jan 1540 in Hildesheim, Germany

**Died:** 31 Dec 1610 in Leiden, Netherlands

**Ludolph Van Ceulen** does not appear to have had a university education as his parents were not sufficiently wealthy to pay for one. He held a number of posts not only as a teacher of mathematics but also as a fencing teacher.

He taught fencing and mathematics in Delft, then in 1594, opened a fencing school in Leiden. In 1600 he was appointed to the Engineering School in Leiden. For the last ten years of his life he taught arithmetic, surveying and fortification in the engineering school.

Van Ceulen is famed for his calculation of  $\pi$  to 35 places which he did using polygons with  $2^{62}$  sides. He spent most of his life doing this and it is fitting that the 35 places of  $\pi$  are engraved on his tombstone.

In Germany  $\pi$  was called the Ludolphine number for a long time.

Van Ceulen had several friends among the mathematicians of the time. In particular his friendships with Simon Stevin and Adriaan Van Roomen were important for van Ceulen's career. His most famous student, who studied under him at Leiden, was Willebrord Snell.

Van Ceulen wrote a number of works including *On the Circle*. Snell translated two of Van Ceulen's books into Latin to make them more accessible to the world-wide mathematical community.

**Article by:** J. J. O'Connor and E. F. Robertson