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New Zealand

Charles Rodius, convict artist

Charles Rodius began his prolific art career in Paris and London. Convicted of thefts in 1829, he was transported to Sydney, where the convict artist produced landscapes, portraits of leading Sydney settlers as well as notable portraits of Aboriginal people, many translated into lithographs. Rodius had a good singing voice. From 1839, aged about 37, he began to suffer a series of strokes that severely affected his ability to draw. To compete with the new technique of popular, cheap but generally unsympathetic photographic portraits, in 1850 he travelled through NSW and Victoria offering his emotive hand-drawn portraits. Robert Stevens analyses his career in more detail than previously, alongside a selection of images from his large output.



ROBERT STEVENS

Charles Rodius (b 1802, arrived 1829, d 1860) was one of the most gifted artists of colonial Australia, a talented painter, draftsman, lithographer, architect and singer. Rodius was multi-lingual, using English as the main language, teaching his native French and German, inscribing art works in French, and being paid as a German translator in court.¹

A self-portrait painted in 1849, originally from the collection of one of his great grandchildren (**plate 1**), shows

Rodius as a middle-aged gent, the plump and proud face suggesting

his education and charm as well as providing ample proof of his delicacy and abilities.²

He signed his name “Rodius” which was the spelling on his certificates of exemption, leave and freedom. “Rhodius” was frequently – almost interchangeably – used in newspaper notices and in communications in the Department of Public Works.³

Early life in Europe

Charles was born in Cologne in 1802, now in Germany but occupied by

1.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860), *Self-portrait* c 1849. Sydney, pen, pastel and charcoal on paper, 29.3 x 24 cm (sheet). Collection: National Portrait Gallery. Acc No 2009-125

French armies from 1794 to 1814; from 1801 all its citizens held French citizenship. The State Archive of North Rhine-Westphalia: Duisburg, West German Society of Family Studies, and Historical Archive of the



2.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860), *Cour de ma demeure Hotel Suisse* [Courtyard of my residence Hotel Suisse] 1823. Paris, watercolour on pencil, 24 x 16 cm, signed Chas Rodius del 1823. Collection: State Library of NSW a709020

3.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860) *M Mingaud* 1827. Paris, lithograph. 15.5 x 11.3 cm (sheet), signed C Rodius 1827. Instructions for the printer are inscribed in red ink around the image. Inscribed in pencil “M Mingaud inventor of Billiard Cue tip”. Collection: National Library of Australia, Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK6985

Archbishopric of Cologne were unable to confirm his birth or family details but did find a Crétian [Christian] Rodius who was born in Cologne in 1802.⁴

He spent several years in Paris where he was “occupied by the French Government in engraving some of the edifices”. At his trial he claimed to have been a student at the “Academy in Paris” for eight years.⁵ He repeated the claim decades later in advertisements in 1843:⁶

DRAWING AND PERSPECTIVE. CHARLES RODIUS, formerly pupil of the Royal Academy of Paris, and many years Teacher of Drawing and Perspective in this colony, begs to acquaint his friends and the public that he continues to give lessons in the above mentioned branches of his profession. C. R. also continues to take portraits in the style of the French Crayon, in which he has hitherto proved so successful. CHARLES RODIUS, Hunter street,

Opposite Elizabeth street. Letters to be left at Mr. Ellard’s, Music Saloon, George-street.

Paris’ painting, sculpture, music and architecture academies were merged to form the Académie des Beaux-Arts in 1816. Madame Alice Thomine-Berrada, curator in charge of paintings, sculptures and objects at Les Beaux-Arts de Paris (Paris Academy), could not find any trace of Rodius or Rhodius, neither in its collection nor in the archives of the 19th-century student files. She concluded that he was probably never a student at the Academy but attended one of the numerous studios which were preparing people for the entrance competition.⁷

In 1823 aged 21, and likely in Paris, he painted a delightful watercolour titled *Cour de ma demeure Hotel Suisse* 1823 which conveys his painting and architectural drawing skills (plate 2). It is likely that Rodius produced other works in Paris.

In 1827, he produced a lithograph of *M. Mingaud inventor of Billiard Cue tip* (**plate 3**). François Mingaud (1771–1847) invented the leather billiard cue tip which revolutionised the game, allowing the ball to be manipulated by spin. Mingaud was known as the “great master of the game”.⁸ The quality of this image, produced when Rodius was 25, indicates proficiency and experience with lithography. This work may have been drawn in Paris but printed in England, as it is titled in English and dated 1827.

England 1826–1829

About 1826 or 1827, he moved to London where in 1826 he sketched some of the Elgin Marbles from the Parthenon in Athens, displayed in the British Museum since 1817.⁹

In February 1829, Rodius was charged with stealing a reticule from Lady Laura Meyrick, daughter of the Duke of Cleveland and wife of Lt-Col William Meyrick, as she was leaving King’s Theatre. *The Times* called him a “young foreigner ... who was dressed very fashionably”. He described himself in court as:¹⁰

German ... and taught music, painting, drawing and languages in families of the first distinction, and also architecture ... and had been a pupil at the Academy at Paris for eight years.

Lady Laura discovered her loss, and suspecting the man who had followed her, sought the assistance of Handley, an officer, who arrested Rodius while trying to rob another lady. The contents of the reticule were found in his possession, and he had a penknife in his hand. A ring, bracelet and a purse containing a half sovereign and six shillings were found in his pocket, and at his residence, ladies’ handkerchiefs, opera glasses, pieces of purses, the clasps of reticules and a purse containing four sovereigns. Rodius protested his innocence, claiming the items were presents from his female pupils.¹¹

Rodius was also charged with robbing Mrs Heatley of Hertford St, Mayfair as she was coming out of Drury Lane Theatre. Mr Heatley identified his wife’s

4.
Charles Rodius
(1802–1860)
Elizabeth Wortner
1829. Newgate,
watercolour 13.3 x
10.2 cm, signed
and dated 1829.
Private collection



property which Handley had found at the prisoner’s dwelling. Handley declared that there would more charges, as further articles hadn’t yet been claimed. The prisoner was remanded for final examinations.¹²

Charles Rodius, who had represented himself in court, was sentenced at Westminster Sessions to seven years’ transportation.¹³ While incarcerated at Newgate Prison, he painted Elizabeth Wortner (**plate 4**), daughter of prison governor John Wortner who later became Marshall of His Majesty’s Gaols.¹⁴ This portrait highlights the sensitivity and delicacy of Rodius’s portraiture and infers the persuasive charm of his personality which was to serve him well in Australia.

On 7 July 1829, aged 27, Rodius was transferred from Newgate Prison to the hulk HMS *York* in Portsmouth Harbour.¹⁵ HMS *York*, a 74-gun Third Rate was launched at Rotherhithe in 1807 and converted into a prison hulk in 1819. She served from 1820 until 1848 and housed about 500 convicts

until taken out of service and broken up in 1854.¹⁶ An engraving of the *York* was produced in 1828, the year before Rodius was imprisoned there (**plate 5**).

Rodius painted a harbour scene in 1829, likely just before his arrest but possibly while in prison or being transported (**plate 6**). This luminous scene highlights an ability to capture the aesthetics of natural scenery.

On 15 August 1829, Rodius was one of 200 male convicts who embarked on the *Sarah*, 100 from the *York* and 100 from the *Leviathan*.¹⁷ The *Sarah*, built in London in 1819, of 488 tons, departed London on 29 August 1829 bound for Sydney.¹⁸ It had a quick passage of 100 days and touched at the islands of Tristan Da Cunha and St Paul’s.¹⁹ The weather was fine for most of the voyage, allowing the prisoners to be on deck all day.²⁰

The prisons were kept clean and dry with stoves lighted all day, and only the oldest men suffered any scurvy.



Rodius, as were other convicts with artistic ability, was assigned to the Department of Public Works as “an artist and architect”, working as a draughtsman for the Government to draw up building plans and train civil and military officers in the art of drawing and perspective.²²

At this time, the position of Colonial Architect did not exist. George Cookney had held it until April 1826 when he was dismissed, and his replacement Ambrose Hallen wasn't appointed until 28 April 1832. Hallen had been appointed Town Surveyor in December 1827, and by 1829 had advanced to the position of “Architect and Town Planner” under Charles Wilson, Director of Public Works.

Wilson was dismissed on 13 March 1832 and the Department of Public Works ceased to function. Out of this disarray, Hallen emerged with increased power and in charge of the remnants of the department on 1 April 1832, and on 28 April 1832 was given the title of Colonial Architect. Rodius worked under Hallen prior to his “Exemption from Government Labour” on 10 July 1832.²³ The “Petition for Exemption” was initially supported by the Department of Public Works, a spokesman stating that the petitioner had been employed as a draughtsman and that his attendance had been very regular.

Perhaps because of the disarray in the Department of Public Works, he seems to have had considerable freedom. Rodius was also teaching drawing privately to the children of prominent Sydney citizens, such as Chief Justice Forbes, who authorised his wife, having observed Rodius's conduct, to write in support of the petition:

We think him deserving of any indulgence which His Excellency the Governor can extend to him.

Rodius later sketched a posthumous portrait of Forbes (**plate 7**). Others who supported the petition included James Laidley, Deputy Commissary General; William Foster, Chairman of the Courts of Quarter Session and

5.

The York. Prison Ship in Portsmouth Harbour, convicts going aboard. 1828. Drawn and etched by Edw. Wm. Cooke, hand coloured 16 x 24 cm. Collection: National Library of Australia, Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK4656

6.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860) [Unidentified harbour scene with fishermen], 1829. Pencil and watercolour on paper, 20.3 x 31.7 cm, signed and dated C. Rodius 1829 l.r. Private collection

Bark and wine were used as an effective prophylactic treatment.

A convict in Sydney 1829–32

Rodius had a harmonious and quick journey. The *Sarah* arrived on 6 December 1829 and it was reported that²¹

The prisoners' state and condition was such, as to show that every attention must have been paid to their health and comfort ... the appearance of the prisoners ... was seldom equalled, never excelled ...



7.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860) *Sir Francis Forbes*. 1852. Sydney, charcoal and crayon 29 x 23 cm, signed and dated 1852 l.l. Collection: State Library of NSW a1528031u

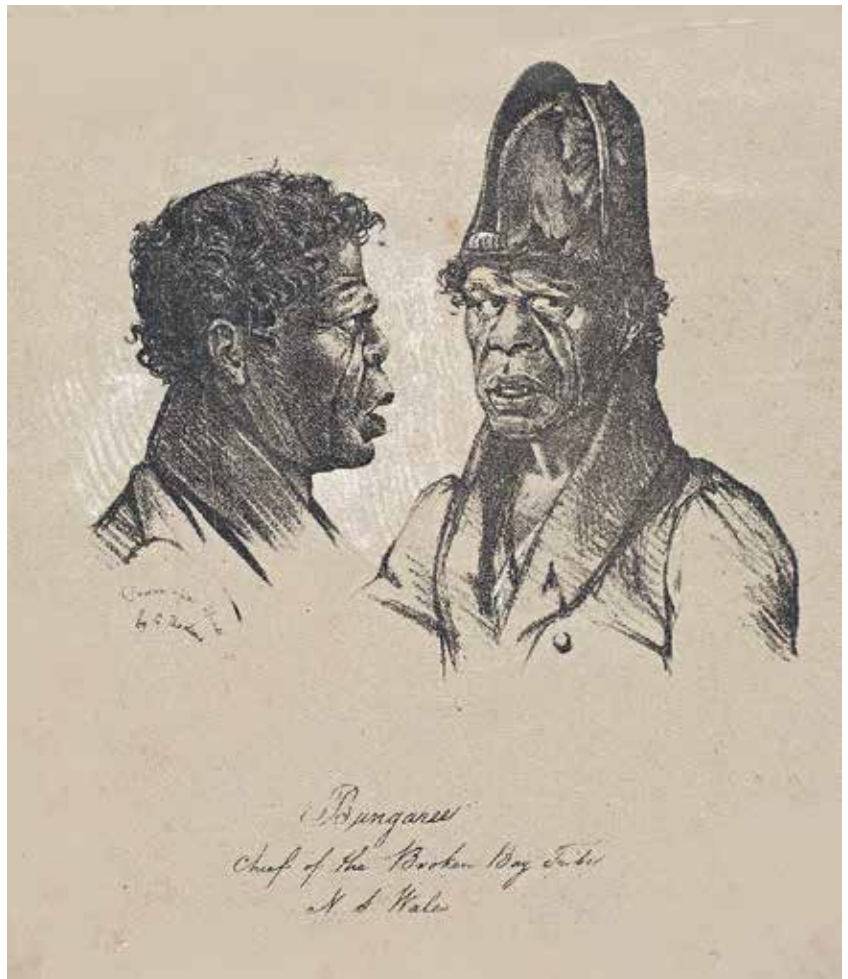
8.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860) *Bungaree*. Two images – at right & a profile, 1829. Pencil on paper, cut out and pasted on paper. Collection: State Library of NSW ML A615 f17

John Edye Manning, Registrar of the Supreme Court.²⁴ His social connections combined with his charm and talent overshadowed his convict status, enabling him to secure the patronage and support of the colony’s citizens.

Almost immediately on arrival in 1829 he began sketching and took a particular interest in portraits of the Aborigines. He sketched Bungaree and produced lithographs dated 1829, using either Earle’s or Carmichael’s press (**plates 8–9**). These lithographs were available by March 1830, as a newspaper reported on 6 March that:²⁵

Mr. C. Rhodius uses the lithographic Press with great skill. He has executed front and profile likenesses of Bungaree, in a most superior style.



9.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860). *Bungaree*. Two images – at left and a profile. 1829, Lithograph. Inscribed “Drawn on stone by C. Rodius” and “Bungaree. Chief of the Broken Bay Tribe”. Collection: State Library of NSW a6169001u



10.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860) *Government House Stables from the Domain looking North*, 1830. Sydney, pencil on paper 15 x 7.5 cm, signed and dated, C Rodius del. Sydney 1830. Collection: State Library of NSW a1120020

11.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860) *William Cox*, 1830. Sydney, miniature portrait, pencil and metalpoint drawing on prepared scratchboard. Collection: State Library of NSW ref code 447441 dig order no Album ID 843715

12.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860) *Anna Cox*. 1830. Sydney, miniature portrait, pencil and metalpoint drawing on prepared scratchboard. Collection: State Library of NSW ML 1380 ref code 447441 dig order no 843715

Bungaree was from Broken Bay and moved to Sydney. He was referred to as “King of Port Jackson”, “King of the Blacks”, or “Chief of the Broken Bay Tribe”. He helped settlers by tracking escaped convicts, but was also influential within his own Aboriginal community, and participated in several voyages of Australian coastal exploration.²⁶ In 1802 he sailed with Matthew Flinders on HMS *Investigator*, becoming the first Australian to circumnavigate the continent, and again in 1815 with Phillip Parker King, who considered him “sharp, intelligent” and of “much service to us in our intercourse with the natives”. Macquarie valued Bungaree as a link between the Aboriginal and British communities and in 1815 allocated land for him and his people. Bungaree was one of Sydney’s most prominent identities.²⁷

In 1830, Rodius sketched the Government House Stables (**plate 10**), built by Governor Macquarie to Francis Greenway’s design in 1821, and without British consent, in an effort to kick-start construction of the new Government House. The elaborate Gothic stables are now the NSW Conservatorium of Music.²⁸

Rodius drew miniature portraits of William Cox and his second wife Anna in 1830 (**plates 11–12**). By then, Cox was a very successful pastoralist and likely came into contact with Rodius in the course of the latter’s duties at the Department of Public Works. In July 1814 Governor Macquarie had commissioned Cox to build the first road through the Blue Mountains, following the successful crossing by Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth in 1813. His work party, consisting of five free men, 30 convict labourers and eight soldiers, made 101 miles of road through rugged mountain country, building over a dozen bridges and splitting hundreds of posts and rails, in six months without serious accident or loss of life. Macquarie had offered the convicts their freedom if the project was completed on time.²⁹

Later, in 1833, Rodius painted a watercolour showing the construction of the road at Lapstone at the eastern edge of the escarpment. This image has come to symbolise the opening up of inland NSW, held up for many years by the mountain barrier, and the subsequent dispersal of the Indigenous people who had lived there for thousands of years (**plate 13**). Rather than a recreation of an earlier scene, this is more likely to be a contemporary view of convict road gangs “completing unfinished sections of road” on the Great Western Highway³⁰ or creating a deviation to reduce the steepness of the road on the Lapstone escarpment.

In 1831, before his Exemption, he painted a watercolour of Cumberland Street, Sydney including a “Cottage Ornée”, designed by Francis Greenway for Robert Campbell in 1825, and completed in 1828 (**plate 14**).³¹ This



was Greenway's last major project and marked the end of his professional life. The accurately delineated images of the buildings highlight Rodius' draftsmanship and architectural skills. Campbell had built the house on the peak of The Rocks, then called Bunker's Hill. Mrs Helenus Scott purchased the house from Campbell, and in 1833 it became the home of Dr James Mitchell, after he married her daughter, Augusta Maria. Their son David Scott Mitchell (1836–1907), the "wealthy, eccentric and reclusive collector of Australiana" bequeathed "the greatest single cultural bequest ever made in Australia" to be housed permanently in the Public Library of NSW on the condition that it be known as The Mitchell Library.³²

Rodius painted a portrait in oils of Robert Campbell, the prominent merchant, pastoralist, and philanthropist, in 1834 (plate 15).

In 1831 he sketched an informal, idyllic view of the harbour (plate 16). In 1832 he painted Springfield House on Woolloomooloo Hill, built as a "hot climate" building using a "Mediterranean" design, and shown set within its newly planted garden. Again the architectural and perspective drawing skills of Rodius are on display (plate 17).

Some months elapsed before the Petition for Exemption made headway. This delay perhaps indicated a tightening up under the new leadership of Hallen, now the Colonial Architect, or, more likely, the Department's dependence on the skills of Rodius.

In May 1832 Ambrose Hallen, wrote to the Colonial Secretary:³³

that the services of the prisoner [Rodius] ... were necessary ... as I have been directed to obtain as far as might be possible a plan of every building already standing in the colony as well as those to be erected. I trust I shall not be deprived of his assistance.

In the same month, Mrs Forbes stopped her children's drawing lessons until she could check whether the prisoner's attendance in her



household was an infringement on the Government's orders respecting the employment of convicts.³⁴ However, on 10 July 1832, he received a Ticket of Exemption from Government Labour which allowed him to practise as an artist so long as he remain in Sydney (plate 18). Later he advertised as a teacher of drawing and perspective and began to earn a living as an artist.³⁵

William Romaine Govett is thought to have been one of his pupils. Govett was a painter and Assistant Surveyor in the Surveyor-General's Department of NSW until 1833 when his career ended abruptly on the restructuring of the department. Later in England he published papers and proficiently drawn sketches of NSW.³⁶

13.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860)
[Convicts Building Road at Lapstone over the Blue Mountains, NSW].
1833. Watercolour, 17.3 x 28.8 cm, signed & dated "Chs Rodius 1833" (lower right); inscribed top right "... Lapstone" Collection: National Library of Australia CDC10570243

14.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860)
Cumberland Street. 1831.
Watercolour, 19.7 x 35.8 cm, signed and dated lower right "C Rodius 1831 Sydney." Collection: State Library of NSW a128520



15.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860) *Copy of a portrait of Robert Campbell*. 1834. Oil, 22 x 18 inches. Collection: State Library of NSW ML 538

Landscapes lithographed in London

On 26 November 1832 it was reported that:³⁷

Mr Rhodius, the artist, has sent to England per Florentia a drawing ... being a view taken from Bunker's Hill ... to the care of Mr Ackerman[n] of The Strand, for the purposes of a plate being engraved from it ...

The *Sydney Monitor* praised Rodius' landscapes:³⁸

We have seen some views of Sydney and the surrounding scenery by Mr.

Rhodius; they are beautifully done in pencil, and reflect the greatest credit on the talents of the artist. Mr. Rhodius has sent to London a general view of Sydney, taken from the front of the Archdeacon's present residence on Bunker's Hill, for the purpose of being engraved under the direction of Mr. Ackerman[n]. The splendid specimens of art which, from time to time are published under this gentleman's name, are a sufficient guarantee that the work will be got up in the first style."—This is an extract from the *Sydney Gazette*. We join our contemporary in giving our mood of praise to Mr. Rhodius, whose style of drawing and sketching is perhaps superior to any artist in the Colony. His water coloured landscapes appear to us beautifully executed, but we do not profess to be judges.

The resulting coloured aquatints (**plate 19**) were returned on the same ship, which arrived on 24 January 1834. The *Sydney Gazette* reported their arrival:³⁹

We have seen a coloured engraving of Port Jackson, taken from the front of the house at present inhabited by the Archdeacon, on Bunker's Hill. The artist is Mr. Rhodius, one, as most of our readers know, of no mean talent. The view was taken, some time back, and sent to London for the purpose of being engraved by Ackerman[n], from whom it has just returned. It is one of the prettiest efforts of genius we have seen in the Colony, and needs only, we are assured, being seen to secure a place in the folio of every lover of the fine arts.

On 21 February 1834, the *Hobart Town Courier* reported that⁴⁰

Mr. Rhodius, the artist, has received by the Florentia a quantity of beautifully coloured engravings, of a view of Port Jackson, executed under the directions of Messrs. Ackerman[n] and Co. from an original drawing of Mr. R., taken expressly for this purpose, and

forwarded to England about twelve months since. – *Australian*.

That sketches could be drawn and transported to London, and lithographs produced and returned to Sydney, in such a short time is impressive, and that a report appeared so soon in Van Diemen's Land, taken from the Sydney newspaper. This was an event of considerable importance to the colony. Such artistic works were rarely available.

On 10 April 1833 the following notice appeared:⁴¹

Mr Rodius, the artist, has just completed six beautiful sketches of Sydney and the harbour ... The landscapes which are accurate when compared from the point of view are prettier than could be expected. They are ... to be sent to Mr Ackerman[n].

It is uncertain whether lithographs were produced from these sketches, although they did make it to England, as a UK private collector, Edwin Hitchon, presented them to the Art Gallery of NSW in 1939.⁴² Two are shown (plates 20–21).

On 5 October 1833, an inquest heard the sad tale of the death of the German, Johan Rodolph Roering, who swallowed an ounce and a half of arsenic and died as a result:⁴³

It appeared from the deposition of Mr Rodius, the artist, that the deceased had met severe losses in the Brazils, and came here to repair his fortunes, but had been disappointed in his hopes.... The Jury returned a verdict, "Died in consequences of having taken poison in a mental state of aberration."

This reminds us of the harshness of life in colonial Sydney and conveys that Rodius, by being referred to as "the artist", had already established a reputation. Roering was a fellow countryman and he probably welcomed an acquaintance so far from Europe.

Rodius received a Ticket of Leave dated 26 February 1834. About this



time, he married seamstress Maria Bryant (plate 18).⁴⁴ The Parish of St James recorded the birth of their son, Charles Prosper, on 27 August 1834.⁴⁵

Native portraits

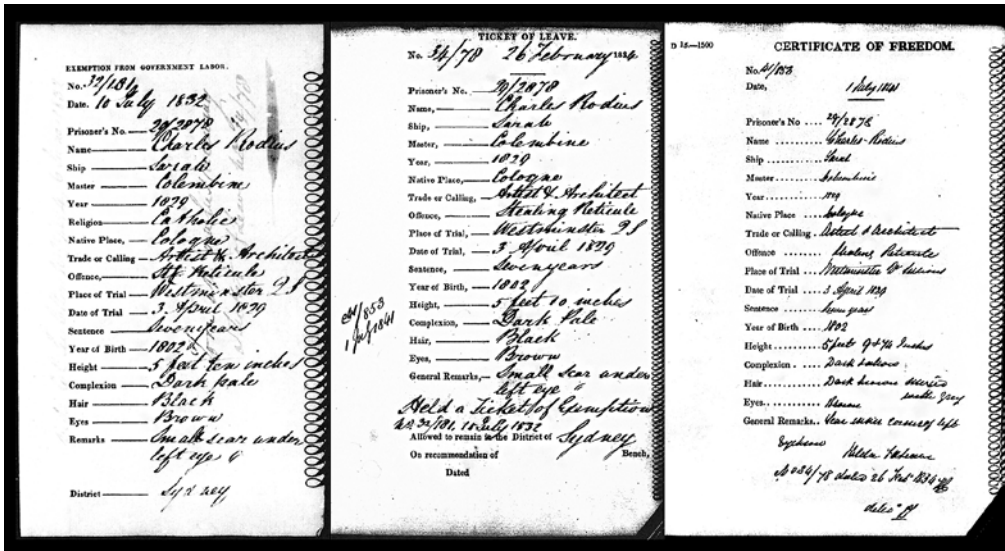
As well as his landscapes and portraits of prominent citizens, Rodius produced many sketches of Aborigines and Maoris, from 1833 to 1835, generally with the view to producing lithographs, for which his French-chalk drawings were eminently suitable. He probably

16.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860) *A View of Sydney, NSW*. Pencil on paper, 18.7 x 31.9 cm. Collection National Gallery of Victoria PS 36915 Rodius

17.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860) *Springfield House on Woolloomooloo Hill*. 1832. Watercolour, 19 x 24.7 cm, inscribed lower left "Wolloomooloo Ch Rodius 1832". Collection: State Library of NSW a140012



18. Charles Rodius. Ticket of Exemption from Government Labour No. 32/181 – 10 July 1832; Ticket of Leave No. 34/78 – 26 February 1834; Certificate of Freedom No. 41/856 – 1 July 1841

sketched the subjects in Sydney.

In 1834, two sets of six lithographs of NSW Indigenous “chiefs” and their wives were printed and published by J. G. Austin (**plates 23–27**), and reported on 7 October 1834 as:⁴⁶

... a well-executed series of lithographic portraits, by Mr Rodius, of several aboriginal chiefs and their wives. The fidelity of the likenesses will at once strike every beholder ...

John Austin, engraver, silversmith and pardoned convict, probably acquired his lithographic press from Augustus Earle when Earle departed in 1829, and having no knowledge of lithography, employed Rodius, now exempt from government service. John Austin set up in the printing business for his relative John Gardener Austin, who had arrived in Sydney in 1834.⁴⁷

Rodius published a second series in 1844. The recording of these accurate, sympathetic and individual images of NSW Indigenous leaders and their wives, was an extremely significant contribution. Many are the only records of these important people.

By the 1830s the Gadigal people, the original clan of the Sydney Cove region, had been decimated, almost half having

died in the smallpox epidemic of 1789. The Gadigal were a clan of the Eora Nation, the collective name given to the clans of the coastal region around Sydney. With the obliteration extending beyond Sydney proper, Aborigines became drawn to Sydney from areas such as Shoalhaven and Five Islands to the South, and Broken Bay and Brisbane Water to the North. These people were the subjects of the Rodius portraits. It has been said that they came because of the attractions of the settlement, or to resist the European expansion and protect their rights to the land. Arranged marriages also brought them.⁴⁸

However, they came largely as a result of their territories having been ruthlessly appropriated. There is no joy in the expressions of Rodius’s sitters, more hopelessness, confusion, distress and anger. It was well understood at the time that the European expansion was leading to the destruction of Indigenous people, and clans were not free to migrate to other areas occupied, in sensitive environmental balance, by neighbouring nations. Resources appropriated by Europeans could not be replaced. The clearing of the land led to a reduction in fauna, the source of food and skins for protection from the cold, and now there was competition with the settlers and their stock for what remained. Wheat and other crops replaced native yam planting, and there

19.

Ackerman & Co, drawn by Charles Rodius, engraved by S.G. Hughes, Sydney Cove, Port Jackson. 1833. Coloured aquatint 22.23 x 39.37 cm. Collection: State Library of NSW c046030001



was increased competition for fish, game and even fresh water – plus the impact of debilitating foreign diseases to which they had no immunity. The clans likely moved to Sydney to escape starvation and cold, and because they had no choice. They were compelled to move as it was impossible to adapt to the new circumstances.

Rodius, a sensitive, artistic man, captures this calamity in the sympathetically portrayed faces of his subjects. By recording these images Rodius has preserved for posterity an understanding of this tragedy.

Others were not so sympathetic. Governor-General Sir William Denison advised Bulwer Lytton, then Secretary for the Colonies:

The physical peculiarities of the race, their want of stamina to resist the slightest access of disease, seem to render their gradual extinction a matter almost of necessity when coupled with the unproductiveness of the females.

In reply, Lytton chided Denison, reminding him sternly of “our duty ... not to relax our efforts in despair”.⁴⁹ Supreme Court Judge Barron Field felt that because Aborigines were of no use to Europeans:⁵⁰

It was better that their name should pass away from the earth.

By the 1820s, the Indigenous people had become fringe-dwellers. These were the people Rodius painted. Remnants of different clans banded together in mixed groups, ignoring old enmities and origins. With official encouragement, they could obtain some of the benefits of “civilisation”, such as blankets, clothing, iron hatchets, fish-hooks, bread, flour, sugar, tea, tobacco and alcohol.⁵¹

The area near Richmond on the Hawkesbury River had both bark huts and colonial mansions in 1830. There were corn fields, peach and orange orchards, pumpkin and cabbage patches, pigs rummaging on wheat stubble, and in the upper reaches of the river, sheep



and cattle grazed. Aborigines were still found on the river in more isolated areas, and when going about their previously normal activities of hunting, fishing and burning off grass, were considered a curiosity. By this time their presence on the Hawkesbury, as recorded by diarists, was greatly reduced and reflected the extent of the dislocation of Indigenous communities.⁵²

In 1835 Rodius painted a picturesque miniature landscape, thought to depict the flood plain of the MacDonald River Valley, near the Hawkesbury, which indicates the extent of European clearing and settlement, and its concentration along the riverbanks (**plate 22**). Although his employment with the Department of Public Works had ceased three years earlier, this tiny image may be an official record of this development.

20.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860)
View from the Government Domain Sydney. 1833. Pencil, 14 x 26 cm approx. Collection: State Library of NSW a635002

21.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860)
View of the Government House Parramatta from the Bridge over the River. 1833. Pencil, 14 x 26 cm approx. Collection: State Library of NSW a635006



22.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860) *The MacDonald River Valley, NSW 1835*. Watercolour on paper, 7.5 x 11.5 cm. Private collection

Despite dispossession, dispersal and decimation from smallpox, traditional groups continued to live in sparsely settled areas around Port Jackson for more than a century after European settlement. They lived in the Mulgoa Valley, Emu Plains, Plumpton, Manly, La Perouse, Salt Pan Creek and Campbelltown until at least the mid-1800s.⁵³

Examples illustrated are sketches of Culuba and his wife Punch (**plates 23–24**); Sangrado and his wife Morirang (**plates 25–26**); Jacko (**plate 27**); and a lithograph of Bidy Salamander, Bulkabra and Gooseberry (**plate 28**).

Little is known of many of these people. Culuba was from Five Island tribe of the Illawarra district. Punch came from Brisbane Water or Broken Bay; Brisbane Water was recorded as her former home in a petition from Captain John Piper to Governor Sir Thomas Brisbane, on behalf of a group of Aborigines, requesting clothes and blankets; Rodius's inscription on Punch's portrait stated nearby Broken Bay.⁵⁴ Sangrado was the chief of Shoalhaven and Morirang his wife. Jacko was chief of Mooloomong. Bidy Salamander was from

the Broken Bay tribe. Bulkabra was King of Botany. Cora Gooseberry was wife to King Bungaree and an identity in Sydney for 20 years after his death. She was known as "Queen of Sydney and Botany" and "Queen of Sydney to South Head".⁵⁵

Many of the Indigenous leaders sketched by Rodius wore named breastplates or gorgets which were modified replicas of those worn as badges by British infantry officers. They became symbols of cultural dispossession, or the imposition of the social system of one culture on another but had little lasting impact on Indigenous society. The breastplates included in Rodius's portraits have helped to identify some of the leaders.

In 1834 he drew a beautifully sympathetic portrait of King Jack Waterman, from the Shoalhaven, likely befriended in Sydney and given the European name by a Mr Waterman and described by a descendant, John C Waterman, as overseer of the Domain in Sydney (**plate 32**). John Waterman wrote that the Sydney Aborigines:⁵⁶

roamed about the city during the day, and camped in the south-east corner of the Domain, near Centipede Rock, south-western side of Wallah-Mallah [Woolloomooloo] Bay, at night.

An inscription in French on the reverse indicates that the portrait

was sketched for Mrs Betsy Abell née Balcombe, the French-speaking daughter of NSW Colonial Treasurer William Balcombe (1778–1829).

Mr Rodius presente ses profonds Respects a Madame Abel et prie qu'elle receive ce joli garcon un nombre de ses souvenirs de la Nouvelle Holland.

Mr Rodius offers his sincere respects to Madame Abel and hopes that she accepts [from] this gentleman a number of his souvenirs of New Holland.

After her father's death, Betsy returned to London in 1834 with her mother. As a young girl, she had befriended Napoleon Bonaparte on St Helena while the Balcombe family was living on the island.⁵⁷ The exiled Bonaparte had lodged with the Balcombes at The Briars while his permanent quarters were being prepared. Later in her memoirs Betsy recalled how she had learned to appreciate Napoleon's⁵⁸

... fascinating smile and kind manner ... His manner was indeed so unaffectedly kind and amiable ... that in a few days I felt perfectly at ease in his society.

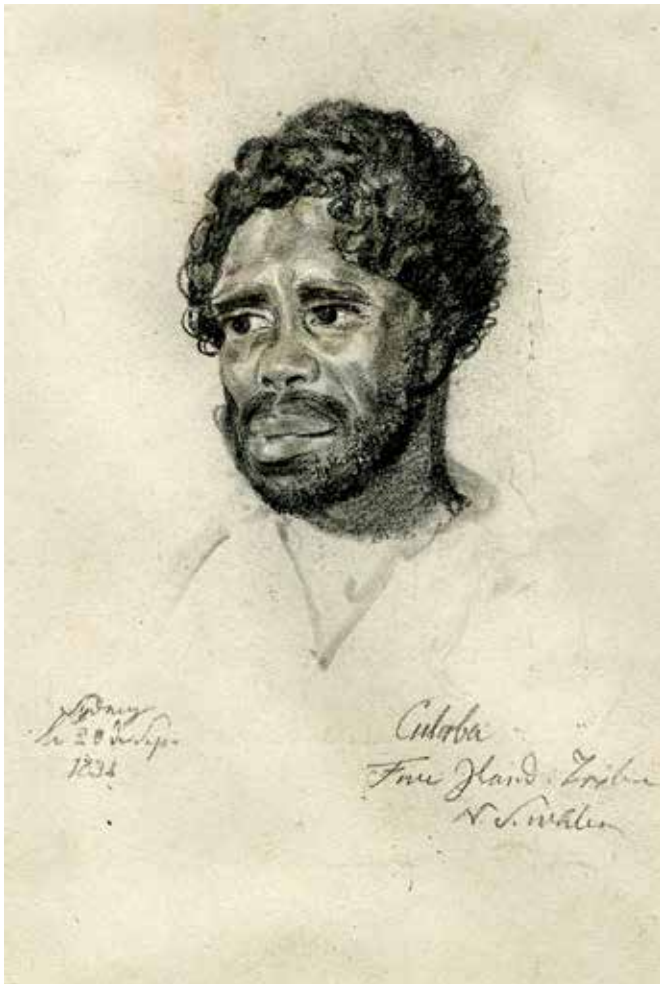
Correspondence from Mr W H Hargraves to Sir William Dixon, written in 1917, 57 years after the death of Rodius, confirms that he was well acquainted with the Balcombes:⁵⁹

About the year 1858 I occasionally met Mr Rodius at Mr [Thomas] Balcombe's residence. He was at that time paralysed on one side. His intellect was clear.

Betsy's brother Thomas Balcombe (1810–1861) was also a fine artist and it is likely their mutual interest in art drew the two men together. Balcombe shot himself dead at his Paddington home, Napoleon Cottage.⁶⁰

Māori portraits

In 1834 Rodius sketched a portrait of the young Māori chief Atay, which is now in the British Museum; a second



portrait of “Atay/ Chief of Otargo/ New Zealand” and dated “Febr 1835” was sold in 2018 and is now in the Hocken Collections, University of Otago Library. The true identity of Atay is unknown however the drawing (**plate 29**)⁶¹

... shows the character of his subject by the strength of his gaze and jut of his jaw. A full moko, ... recorded with care and respect on such a youthful chief, suggests he was well known ... even more significant is that it depicts a young Māori chief in the years before the Treaty of Waitangi was signed.

There is no evidence that Rodius visited New Zealand. However, many Māoris visited Sydney as a result of the large volume of shipping between the two countries. In *A Narrative of a Nine Months' Residence in New Zealand in 1827*, Augustus Earle tells of Māoris sailing back with him on the brig

Governor Macquarie, “they being always anxious to see the colony”.⁶²

Rodius sketched other Māoris in 1834, for example *Taghi from Nangango*, also with a full moko (**plate 30**) and *Adodoo, a New Zealand Chief's Daughter* (**plate 31**).

Established artist 1835–

Having received his Ticket of Leave, Rodius could now purchase land.⁶³ On 23 May 1835 Rodius purchased three allotments, paying £45 for a block in Campbell Street and £39 18s and £38 19s respectively for two blocks in John Street.⁶⁴ This indicates he was making a reasonable living and benefitting from the sale of his prints of Aborigines and views of Sydney. The Act requiring property buyers to be British subjects, or naturalised, wasn't legislated until 1849.

Other artists called upon Rodius to transform their portraits into editions of lithographs, as in this example, probably by Richard Read Jr.:⁶⁵

23.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860) *Culoba*, 1834. Black chalk with stump on paper, 22.4 x 15.1 cm, inscribed in black chalk, dated lower left “Sydney le 20 July 1834”. Inscribed lower right “Culoba 5 l'land tribe NSW”. British Museum Collection, reg. mo. MN 1840.1114.65. Purchased from J F Clarkson 1840

24.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860) *Punch*, 1834. Black chalk with stump, touched with red and white chalk, on paper 21.7 x 15 cm, inscribed in black chalk, dated lower left “Sept 1834”, inscribed lower right “Punch Ginno (wife) of Culoba”. British Museum Collection, reg. no. MN 1840.1114.66. Purchased from J F Clarkson 1840



25.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860)
Sangrado, Pilot of Shoalhaven,
 1834. Pencil and charcoal, 26.9 x
 18.7 cm, signed lower right Chs
 Rodius / Aug... 1834 / Sydney
 NSW, inscribed Cabignow lower left.
 Collection: State Library of NSW
 a1155008u

26.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860)
Morirang – The lady of Sangrado,
Chief of Shoalhaven Tribe, 1834.
 Crayon, 28 x 18.8 cm, inscribed
 lower right. Collection National
 Library of Australia CDC106443060

Rodius, from a painting by Mr. Reid,
 the artist, and printed by Mr. J. G.
 Austin. It is one of the best colonial
 attempts in the Lithographic line of art
 which we have yet witnessed. A more
 striking resemblance it would not be
 easy to pourtray.

In 1836 he painted a fine watercolour
 of the first Government House,
 “commonly accepted as the most
 accurate portrayal” (**plate 33**). Governor
 Phillip’s initial six-room structure,
 with skillion additions, was repaired,
 altered and extended by successive
 Governors, as they complained
 bitterly that it was damp, unsuitable,
 too small, inconvenient and in poor
 condition. Dilapidated, defective,
 too costly to repair and obstructing
 Sydney’s development, it was gradually
 demolished, and by December 1846 had
 almost disappeared.⁶⁶

His architectural drawing skills
 were recognised in 1837, when he was

awarded second prize of £50 for “some
 splendid drawings of architectural
 beauty” of a proposed building for the
 Sydney Exchange Company.⁶⁷ The
Sydney Herald considered “Mr Rhodius’s
 drawings are beautifully executed—they
 are perfect pictures.”⁶⁸

In September 1837 E. D. Barlow
 had announced that he had taken over
 and re-opened J. G. Austin’s “Original
 Zincographic Printing Establishment”,
 Austin having retired to the country.
 Barlow employed William Nicholas to
 produce portraits including Aborigines.
 In October 1840, when Nicholas
 was his manager, Barlow sold most
 of his business to William Baker,
 who continued to print portraits of
 Aborigines by Nicholas into the mid-
 1840s. Baker’s purchase of Barlow’s
 equipment secured the rights to publish
 works originally issued by J. G. Austin
 and Barlow. He published the portraits
 of William Fernyhough and Rodius,
 adding his own studies of Aborigines.

LATE REV. RICHARD HILL.

We have just been favoured with a
 very correct likeness of this lamented
 gentleman, drawn on stone by Mr.

Musical performances

Rodius was a respected music performer and sang a song by Weber at a concert at the Theatre Royal (Royal Hotel) on 31 August 1836, his soft voice giving “universal delight”.⁶⁹ Then on 14 September 1836 he sang again at the Theatre Royal, his performance applauded.⁷⁰

The Amateur, Mr Rhodius, was an object of some attraction ... He sung a pleasing little French song, by Boildeau, in a very plaintive style, without any attempt at display, either of compass of voice or power of execution, and was rapturously encored.

Levey’s Theatre Royal (1833–38), previously Royal Assembly Rooms (1829–32) and Saloon of the Royal Hotel (1832–33), was the first continuously licensed permanent theatre in Australia. Built by London-born Barnett Levey (1798–1837), the first free Jewish settler in the colony, in 1829 behind the Royal Hotel, the venue was not licensed until 1832. While being fitted out Levey used a saloon of the hotel for the first performances. It closed in September 1838 and was destroyed by fire in 1840. Levey is regarded as the “Father of Australian Theatre”. He ran the theatre until his death in 1837.⁷¹

Rodius was a soloist at the colony’s first Oratorio held at St Mary’s Cathedral on 21 September 1836, consisting of Handel’s *Messiah* and Haydn’s *The Creation*.⁷² Macquarie had laid the foundation stone of the first St Mary’s Chapel, blessed by Father Therry, in 1821. In 1835, not long before the Oratorio, Bishop John Bede Polding was installed as the first Catholic Archbishop of Sydney and St Mary’s Chapel was elevated to Cathedral status. In 1865 the Cathedral was destroyed by fire.

The Oratorio was assessed on 29 September 1836:⁷³

Taking everything into consideration, the Oratorio, being the first attempted in the colony, cannot fail to be spoken of with feelings of delight: it speaks as to the advancement of the fine arts, and the cultivated taste of the inhabitants.

27.

Charles Rodius
(1802–1860)
Jacko, Chief of Mooloomong, 1834.
Pencil and charcoal
on paper, 18.5 x
13.9 cm, inscribed
lower right “Ch
Rodius. del Sydney
30 May 1834”.
Collection: State
Library of NSW
a1155003 DLPd40



This was a major event for the colony and Rodius’s performance was reported extensively in the Sydney press. On 23 September 1836:⁷⁴

“He was despised and rejected of men” (The Messiah) was sung with great sweetness by Mr Rodius. His cadences were soft and sweet, and quite delightful. He possesses more power than he displayed: and were he to sing more boldly he would sing more successfully. In the duet of “Graceful consort by thy side” (The Creation), with Mrs Chester, he evinced the correctness of his taste and judgement ...

Other assessments were equally complimentary:

*“there is a delicacy of intonation in Mr R’s voice which is universally admired.”⁷⁵
“Mr Rodius, we are glad to see, is*

appearing oftener in public ... The gentleman has no male competitor in the colony.”⁷⁶

“The manner in which Mr Rodius sang “He was despised”, with his usual sweet and tasteful style and baritone voice, made a great impression.”⁷⁷

“Mr Rodius stands preeminent amongst his brethren in the profession”⁷⁸

Rodius performed again on 1 February 1837⁷⁹ and once more at the Theatre Royal on 29 September 1837, in the presence of Governor Bourke.⁸⁰

This was the last evidence of Rodius performing. His declining health was reported in 1838 and his first stroke in 1839. The death of Barnett Levey in 1837, the closure of the Theatre Royal in 1838, and then its destruction in 1840, had likely left Sydney without musical leadership and a suitable musical venue. Rodius’s continuing commitment was shown when he exhibited a portrait of the eminent musician and composer



28.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860) (print after), J G Austin (printer), *Biddy Salamander, Bulkabra and Gooseberry*, 1834. Lithograph, Drawn from nature and on stone, 17.7 x 12 cm. Titled: Biddy Salamander, Broken Bay Tribe; Bulkabra, Chief of Botany; Gooseberry, Queen of Bungaree. Collection National Library of Australia CDC10643056

Joseph Gutrot in the 1849 Exhibition of the Society for the Promotion of Fine Art, and in 1851, his acclaimed portrait of the celebrated singer, Sara Flower.

Declining health and wives' deaths

On 4 July 1838 advertisements advised the sale of his effects:⁸¹

Household Furniture, Drawings, Engravings, Books, &c, TO BE

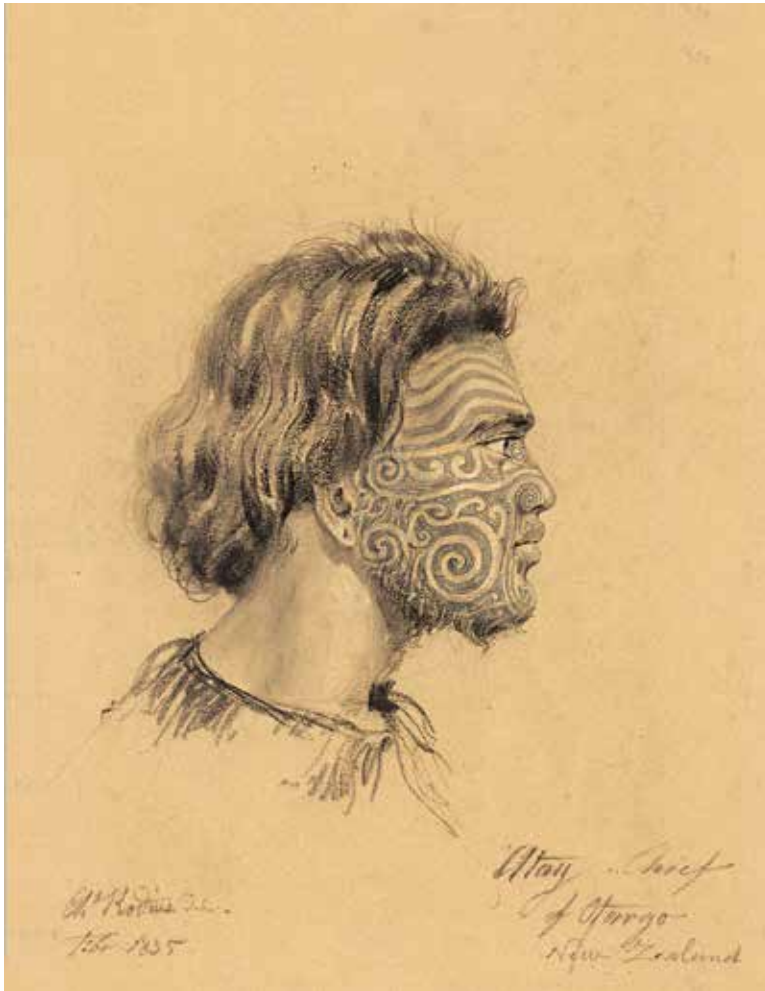
SOLD BY AUCTION, BY W. HEBBLEWHITE, TO-MORROW, the 5th July, at Eleven o'Clock, at the residence of Mr. RHODIUS, Elizabeth street, three doors from Liverpool street, the whole of that Gentleman's Household Furniture, Works of Art, &c., &c. COMPRISING – CHESTS of DRAWERS, Dining Tables, and Dressing Room ditto, Cheffioneer, Elegant Liqueur Case, A few choice Books of Literatu[r]e and the Arts, Specimens of Drawings, Engravings, &c., &c., and the usual assortment of Kitchen Utensils &c., &c. The above will be positively sold in consequence of Mr. Rhodius leaving Sydney for the benefit of his health.

In 1838 Rodius married young Harriet Taylor, indicating that his first wife Maria, whom he had married about 1833, had died. Just months later, Harriet, aged 17 or 18 years

(notices vary) after a four-day illness, died of influenza at her home in Elizabeth Street, and was buried in the old Sandhills Cemetery in Devonshire Street, Sydney. Charles was bereft; he inserted death notices in at least five newspapers,⁸² and personally designed and carved her headstone.⁸³

Sacred to the memory of Harriet Rodius, who died on 14 December, 1838, aged eighteen years. After a short illness of four days. This inscription is sculptured by her afflicted husband; as a last tribute his affection can offer to her memory.

Shortly afterwards in 1839, Rodius suffered a paralytic stroke but fortunately recovered.⁸⁴ This was the first of his recorded strokes, perhaps induced from the anguish of the loss of his two wives. By December 1839, Rodius was well enough to resume his teaching:⁸⁵



Mr C Rodius, who for some time past has suffered under paralytic attack, begs to notify, that being now recovered, he intends to resume his occupation as Teacher of Drawing and Perspective, in which capacity he has been engaged in this colony for the past 9 years. 99 Elizabeth St.

Out of necessity, Rodius continued to work as a teacher and portraitist, in spite of his affliction, advertising on 12 May 1840:⁸⁶

Mr Rodius who has been sometimes successful in his French Chalk Drawings in Portraits, will be happy to resume his work in this style.

On 1 April 1841, he married for the third time. Harriet Elizabeth Allen was the daughter of Josiah Allen, also an artist, transported to Sydney for forgery, and Mary Ann née Nichols, transported for uttering forged notes. They were wed

at St Phillip's Church, Sydney by Rev. W. Cowper.⁸⁷ That Rodius had married three times in seven years indicates desideratum for female company and support. In 1849 they had a daughter Theresa. His self-portrait (**plate 1**) passed to Theresa and then from her along four generations.⁸⁸

In July 1841 he received a Certificate of Freedom, and, on 13 July, sailed for Port Phillip. The length and purpose of his stay is not known (**plate 18**) but was probably to seek new commissions.⁸⁹ The next year he was back in Sydney, and exhibited a portrait of the colonial poet William Beverley Suttor (1805/6–1882):⁹⁰

THE POET — At Tegg's Fancy Bazaar, is now on view, the portrait of Beverly Suttor, Esq., by Rhodius.

In June 1843 he advertised giving lessons and taking portraits.⁹¹ A little later, he tried to capitalise on

29.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860), *Atay, Chief of Otargo, New Zealand*, 1835. Charcoal graphite and watercolour on tinted wove paper, 20.5 x 10.5 cm, signed and dated lower left "Ch Rodius del Feb 1835", inscribed lower right "Atay Chief of Otargo [sic] New Zealand". Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago V2018.06.1

30.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860), *Taghi from Nangango*, 1834. Charcoal and pencil, 18.4 x 13.3 cm, signed Ch's Rodius. Collection: State Library of NSW DLPd49



31.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860) *Adodoo*, 1834. Pencil and charcoal on paper, 18.1 x 13.9 cm, signed and dated lower left “Ch Rodius 1834”, inscribed lower centre “Adodoo, New Zealand Chiefs Daughter.” Collection: State Library of NSW DLPd51

32.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860) *King Jack Waterman*, 1834. Crayon, charcoal and watercolour on brown paper further tinted by the artist, 18.5 x 12.5 cm, signed and dated lower left “Ch Rodius 1834”, inscribed lower centre “King (Jack Water)man”, inscribed lower right (illeg.), inscribed along top of verso support. Private collection

the notoriety of the murderer John Knatchbull. Rodius had advertised in January 1844 the pending production of a lithograph of the notorious villain:⁹²

CHARLES RODIUS respectfully
begs to acquaint the public that he is

preparing and will shortly publish, a lithograph likeness of John Knatchbull, convicted of the murder of Ellen Jamieson, of whom a likeness in profile will in the same drawing be subjoined.

By 3 February 1844, Baker’s Hibernian Press had produced the lithographs:⁹³

Mr Baker, zealous to satisfy all tastes, has published two works of very dissimilar character. The first is a book of Psalm Tunes for the Presbyterian Church ... The second is a portrait of the murderer Knatchbull, drawn by Rodius ...

Rodius and Baker were profiting from the infamy of Knatchbull whose lurid crimes engendered “ghoulish curiosity” in his trial; his execution at Darlinghurst Gaol on 13 February 1844 attracted 10,000 spectators.⁹⁴ Also in 1844, Charles Rodius drew John Ahern, murderer of Mary Anne Clarke. These notorious characters attracted great public interest and business for Rodius.

Looking for work

In 1844 Rodius produced further sketches and lithographs of Aborigines. An example of these later works is a sketch of Ricketty Dick, from Broken Bay (**plate 34**). Ricketty Dick was also known as Warrah Warrah or William (Bill) Warrah, Worrell or Worrall. After Bungaree he is the most portrayed Indigenous man of early Sydney. Both of his legs became paralysed as he became old, hence his nickname which rhymed with “walking stick”. He lived in various Aboriginal camps in eastern Sydney. The Danish-born silversmith and jeweller Julius Hogarth produced two small statuettes in silver and gold, a walking stick – his head in silver and gold as the handle, medals and tokens with his image in profile. These are often seen as a tribute.⁹⁵

At about this time, Rodius sketched Hamilton Collins Sempill (**plate 35**). Sempill immigrated to Australia in 1830 and received a 2,560-acre land grant at Belltrees in the Hunter Valley. In 1831/1832 he built a sandstock



dwelling, The White Cottage, with convict labour. The cottage still stands and offers farmstay accommodation.⁹⁶

In 1846 Rodius sketched a portrait of “Dr” Friedrich Wilhelm Ludwig Leichhardt (1813–c 1848) and had lithographs produced (**plate 36**). Leichhardt completed an overland journey of almost 4,800 km from Jimbour on the Darling Downs to Port Essington on the Cobourg Peninsula, NT. Believed to have perished, his unexpected arrival back in Sydney in March 1846 was greeted with great rejoicing. Leichhardt was hailed “Prince of Explorers” and his party as national heroes.⁹⁷ The *Australian* published a report with a map of the route and offered a Rodius lithograph for inclusion.⁹⁸ Rodius was profiting from the hero status of Leichhardt. The famous, like the infamous, attracted considerable public interest.

In 1846 he sketched Williamina Bradley, known as Minna (**plate 37**). Minna was the granddaughter of William Bradley, first lieutenant on HMS *Sirius* which sailed with the First Fleet in 1787. He surveyed Sydney Harbour on the *Sirius* with John Hunter in 1788 and Bradley’s Head is named after him. About this time, Rodius painted a young boy on a pony; on the

back of the frame Rodius has inscribed: “Charles Rodius pinxit Sydney” (**plate 38**).

On 26 July 1847, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that Rodius’s landscape works were displayed at the First Exhibition of the Society for the Promotion of Fine Art in Australia. He was in good company; exhibitors included C Martens, J S Prout, W Nicholas, G E Peacock, J Backler, S Elyard, O W Brierley, J Janssen, T Balcombe, F Garling, H S Melville and J Fowles. One of his works “Church of Cologne on the Rhine” was a reminder of his probable birthplace.

William Baker published an illustrated weekly journal, *Heads of the People*, during 1847 and 1848. William Nicholas drew most of the portraits, with a few by Rodius, such as the basic portrait of the orator Robert Lowe (1811–1892), later Viscount Sherbrooke, Chancellor of the Exchequer (**plate 39**). Prior to this Rodius had concentrated on highly finished portraits and lithographs such as those of Sempill and Leichhardt (**plates 35–36**).⁹⁹

In 1849 Rodius and his father-in-law Josiah Allen combined to produce a lithograph of Jackey Jackey, the Indigenous guide known for his faithful devotion to the explorer Edmund Kennedy.¹⁰⁰ Kennedy had

33.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860)
Government House, Sydney. 1836.
 Watercolour 19.3 x 38.4 cm signed
 lower left “Chas Rodius delt 1836”.
 Collection: State Library of NSW
 a918088

died in his arms in 1848, speared by hostile Aborigines, while exploring Cape York Peninsula. Jackey Jackey was the only survivor of this expedition. The lithograph was praised in the contemporary press as an “excellent likeness” (**plate 40**).¹⁰¹

Rodius planned to supplement his income by teaching drawing at the Mechanics School of Arts. On 18 December 1848 the School of Arts had announced that:¹⁰²

We are happy to state that the drawing class of the School of Arts is now fully constituted, and that the plan of instruction proposed by Mr Rodius having been approved by the Committee, that talented gentleman has been appointed to the Superintendence of the Class.

However, students became dissatisfied and “dropped out”, the blame laid on



34.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860) 1844. *Ricketty Dick*. Charcoal on paper. 20.3 x 18.1 cm, signed and dated lower left “Ch Rodius 1844”, inscribed along lower edge, partly cut off “Broken Bay Tribe”. Collection: State Library of NSW PXA1005

35.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860) *Hamilton Collins Sempill*. 1827. This date is incorrect (neither Rodius nor Sempill was in the colony in 1827), more likely 1840s. Charcoal and crayon, 25 x 20 cm, signed lower left “Chas Rodius delt 1827”. Collection: State Library of NSW a5563001

The second exhibition of The Society for the Promotion of Fine Art in Australia was reported on 2 June 1849.¹⁰⁴ Rodius exhibited a portrait of Monsieur Gautrot, since lost, which was described as “a free, light, loose sketch, full of artistical talent, and a very striking likeness.” Joseph Gautrot, the eminent violinist, composer and professor of music, produced many original Australian works; only one, his *Josephian Hymn*, has survived.¹⁰⁵

On 3 August 1849 Rodius received a payment of one guinea for acting as a German interpreter in the Supreme Court.¹⁰⁶

Likeness after death

On 30 March 1850 Rodius advertised with a new twist:¹⁰⁷

Mr Charles Rodius has the honor of announcing to the public, that he still continues to take Portraits in Chalk and Colours. Mr R. also undertakes, in the event of the loss of deceased friends or relatives, to produce a likeness after death capable of supplying affection’s

broken link in the memory of the survivors.

He developed this notion – which photographers could not match – in an advertisement in the *People’s Advocate*.¹⁰⁸

CHARLES RODIUS has the honour to announce to the Patrons of Art, that he still continues to take portraits in chalk and in colour; and also ventures to remind those who may have been, unhappily, suddenly bereaved of some dear relative or friend, of his success in procuring a likeness after death, to supply a broken link in the chain of memory. Also teacher of Drawing in its different branches, and Practical Perspective. Apply at Messrs. MADER and KERN, Hunter-street.

Rodius, still a foreigner, was granted a Certificate of Naturalisation on 18 June 1850. This enabled him to obtain legal title to land, a privilege denied foreigners.¹⁰⁹

the “absence of anything like a system of teaching on the part of the master”. As a result his class was disbanded and he was later dismissed. It was said that he was concentrating his attention on a small number of students, perhaps the more talented.¹⁰³



Peripatetic artist

Late in 1850, Rodius travelled wider afield looking for new clients. He toured to the Hunter Valley; from 7 October he was staying and working for “about a fortnight” in Maitland.¹¹⁰

MR. CHARLES RHODIUS, Artist, presents his respects to the lovers of Art, and begs to acquaint the inhabitants of Maitland and its environs that he will be in Maitland on the 7th October, where he will remain about a fortnight, and will take LIKENESSES in his style of French chalk. Specimens may be seen at Mr. Ikin's, or at Mr. P. Green's, West Maitland. Any communications will be punctually attended to at Mr. Yeomans's, “Northumberland Hotel.”

Then he was off to Melbourne, on 29 November sailing from Sydney on the small schooner *Hirondelle*, arriving in Melbourne on 9 December.¹¹¹ A report in the *Melbourne Morning Herald*, reproduced in *Bell's Life in Sydney*, noticed a lithograph of G.R. Nichols and his drawing of Melbourne artist, hotelier and historian Wilbraham Frederick Evelyn Liardet:¹¹²

Another excellent likeness of a character better known in Melbourne, “Liardet”, – is admirable: the drawing *perfect*.

In January 1851, he was plying his trade in Geelong, and as he had in Maitland, staying at one of the city's hotels.¹¹³

PORTRAIT DRAWING. –We have had the pleasure of inspecting several excellent portraits from the crayon of Mr. Rodius, an old and respected citizen of Sydney, who has paid Geelong a visit, and may be seen professionally, at the Commercial Hotel. His drawings are marked by accuracy and characteristic force.

Rodius, probably still in Victoria, advertised his Sydney stock of lithographs in March 1851, when he announced¹¹⁴

CHARLES RODIUS RESPECTFULLY acquaints the public that he has still on hand about forty copies of the Likeness of the Rev. J. C. Sumner, which

36.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860) 1846. *Dr Leich[h]ardt*. Charcoal on paper, 88.5 x 38.3 cm, signed lower left “Dr Leich[h]ardt 1846”. Collection: National Library of Australia CDC10570248

37.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860) *Minna Bradley*, 1846. Watercolour over pencil, 28 x 23 cm, signed and dated lower left “Cha Rodius 1846”, inscribed on label attached to back in another hand “Minna Bradley aged 2, Goulburn and Sydney NSW, 1844–1881”. Private collection

may be had at Kern & Mader's, Hunter-street, and at Mr. Clayton's, King-street East. Any person wishing to purchase the original drawing upon stone, may have the same by applying to Messrs. Mader and Kern. P. S.— Likenesses taken in the French Chalk style, from 30s to £2 2. Apply at Mader & Kern.



38.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860),
[Young boy on a Pony], oil on canvas,
 30 x 40 cm. Private collection

and guarantees to make a correct likeness by chalk and smoke; and if not satisfactory to the friends Mr Rodius will forfeit the payment of his exertions, of 3 guineas with frame. Castlereagh St, corner of gateway to the circus ...

Changes of address and his offer of a refund indicate declining circumstances. The advent of photography which enabled multiple copies of accurate images, was impacting his business. In 1853, he was trying to resist the new, cheap but inferior technology:¹²³

In May he again advertises that he will be taking portraits in Sydney¹¹⁵

CHARLES RODIUS has the honour to announce to the Patrons of Art, that he still continues to take portraits in chalk and in colour ; and also ventures to remind those who may have been, unhappily, suddenly bereaved, of some dear relative or friend, of his success in procuring a likeness after death, to supply a broken link in the chain of memory. Also teacher of Drawing in its different branches and Practical Perspective. Apply at Messrs. MADER and KERN, Hunter-street.

By June, he's definitely back in Sydney, supposedly "for a short period"¹¹⁶

MR. CHARLES RODIUS, having returned from Melbourne, begs to offer his services to any lovers of Art desirous of obtaining correct Portraits in his style of French Crayon. Mr. Rodius' stay in Sydney will be but for a short period. No. 9, Colonnade, Bridge-street, at Mr. Blunt's.

After his "artistic exploration of Port Phillip", the following "Fine Arts" review was published:¹¹⁷

We have been favoured with the review of a portrait of Miss Sara Flower, from the pencil of Mr Charles Rodius, who has lately returned from an artistic exploration of Port Phillip. The likeness of the celebrated *cantatrice* is admirable ...

Sara, a celebrated contralto vocalist and teacher of singing, settled in Sydney 15 April 1850 after first arriving in Melbourne 13 February 1850.¹¹⁸

The Electoral Rolls for 1851–52 list Rodius's residence as a dwelling house in Riley Street.¹¹⁹ In 1852 he sketched Edward Smith Hall, the outstanding, passionate editor, possibly the greatest name of the struggle for the freedom of the press during Darling's governorship (**plate 41**). Hall vigorously attacked the despotic measures of Government House, the tyranny of country magistrates, and the oppression of the convicts.¹²⁰

On 5 October 1852 an advertisement gave his address as 31 Bridge-street, Sydney.¹²¹

The following was recorded on 31 May 1853:¹²²

Mr Charles Rodius presents his respects to the inhabitants of Sydney in general

Another Novelty – Daguerre types and Photographs and a dozen other startling inventions of modern science are now familiar to us, and the likenesses of half the Sydney folks taken by those means look at us in every house we enter. But Mr Charles Rodius, ... guarantees to produce faithful portraits by the means of – Crayons and Smoke ...

In 1854 he sketched Henry Parkes, who became the longest non-consecutively serving Premier of the Colony of NSW, known as the "Father of Federation" due to his promotion for the federation of the six colonies of Australia, as a critic of British convict transportation, and as a proponent for the expansion of the Australian continental rail network (**plate 42**).¹²⁴

On 14 April 1855 another advertisement reiterated the deleterious impact of photography on his livelihood:¹²⁵

Mr Rodius, Artist, respectfully acquaints the public of Sydney and its environs, that he will guarantee a correct likeness, in his style and at the same expense as a Daguerreotype or Photograph, and depicting the brilliancy of eye, and avoiding the stiffness which detracts so much from correctness of expression in the latter.

Affliction

In 1856 he suffered a second, debilitating stroke:¹²⁶

MR. RODIUS, who has been for twenty-six years teacher of drawing, having been afflicted with a severe attack of paralysis, which completely prevents him from following his profession, now begs leave to appeal to his former pupils and friends, for such kind assistance as they may be pleased to afford him in his present very reduced circumstances. Any contribution or communication left to the care of Mr. MADER, Repository of Arts, George-Street, will be thankfully received.

This was followed by several increasingly strident appeals for help.

Mr. Rodius. the well known and talented artist is afflicted with paralysis which utterly incapacitates him from following his profession ...

In March 1858 he offered a wider range of skills:¹²⁷

MR RODIUS begs to intimate that, having been unfortunately afflicted with a severe attack of paralysis, which prevented him pursuing his usual avocation as a teacher of Drawing—his profession for some twenty-six years, is now prepared to give reading lessons in the French and German languages; and would be happy to wait upon any family, lady, or gentleman requiring his services. Any communication addressed to the care of Mr Mader, Repository of Arts, George-street Sydney, will be attended to.

Donations to the Australian Museum during September 1858 included “A series of thirteen elaborate drawings, made by Mr. Rhodius from the Elgin marbles, in 1826, by Mr. Charles Rhodius”¹²⁸ perhaps a benevolent gesture as he approached the end of his life. If the date is right, it shows Rodius was in London in 1826 and sketching like an art student.

39.

Charles Rodius del.
Published W Baker.
Robert Lowe. 1847.
Lithograph, 27.9
x 22.5 cm, signed
lower left “Rodius
del 1847”, inscribed
lower right “Robert
Lowe The Orator”.
Collection: National
Library of Australia
Rex Nan Kivell
Collection NK720/28
CDC10643058



The donation was prior to administrative records and there is no correspondence either incoming or outgoing with Rodius. A search carried out by the Archivist of the Australian Museum was unable to locate them in either the archives or the library.¹²⁹ A set of minutes contain a copy of the newspaper article with a handwritten annotation “books”. At various times, material deemed inappropriate to the Museum’s collection, was sent to other institutions such as the SLNSW and MAAS. What happened to the drawings remains a mystery.

Rodius died in the Liverpool Hospital (for paupers) on 7 April 1860, presumably survived by his third wife Harriet Elizabeth, who would have inserted the death notices:¹³⁰

On the 7th of April, aged 56 years, after a long and lingering illness, at his late residence, Mr. Charles Rodius, artist, for many years a resident in this colony.

He died in a Greenway-designed building, fitting as he had recorded so many of the architect’s buildings while employed at the Department of Public Works, and in his sketches and watercolours. He was buried at Devonshire Street Cemetery, since removed for Central Railway Station.¹³¹

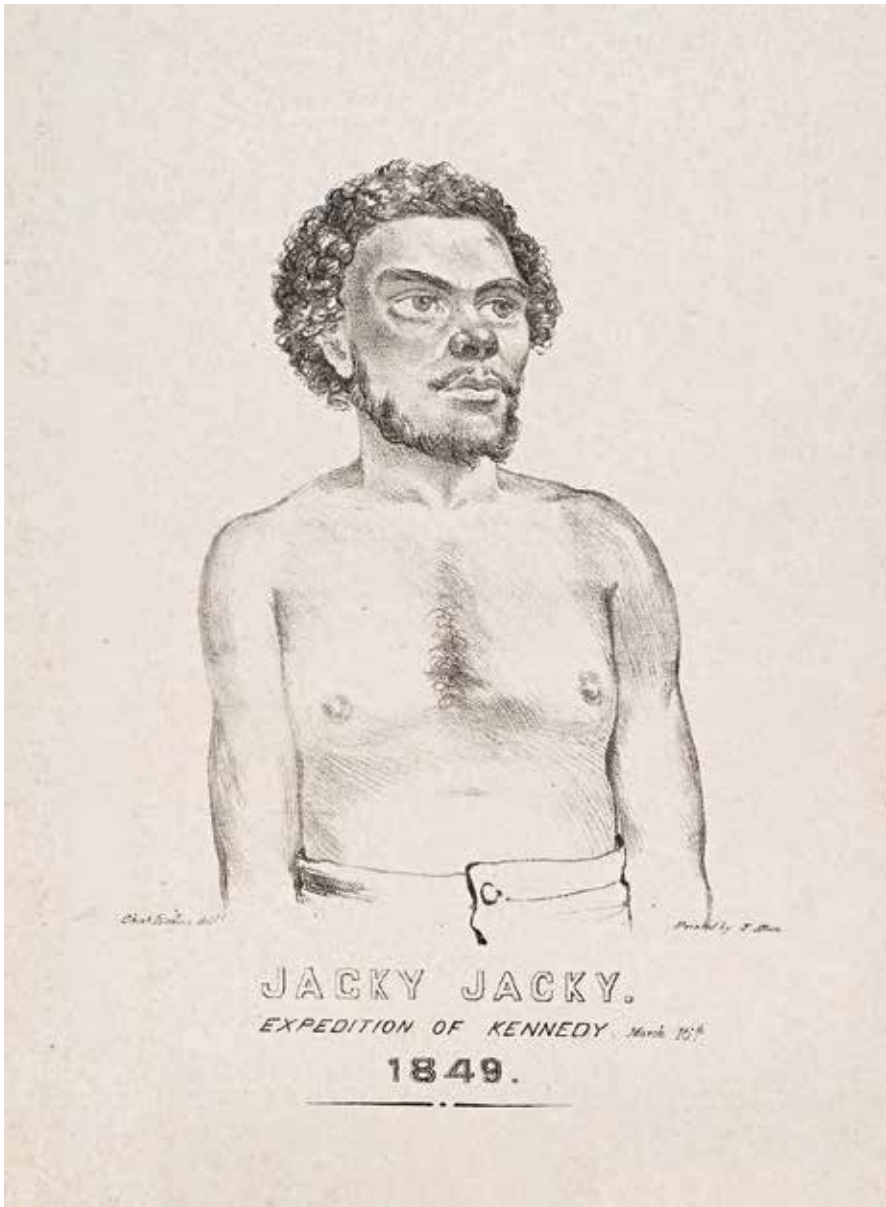
His art

Joanna Gilmour:¹³²

“While perhaps less lauded or well known, the work of Charles Rodius parallels and sometimes surpasses that of other artists whose Australian careers originated in convictism ... ”
“... some of his images of aboriginals were towards caricatures but others such as the men and women of the Shoalhaven District are disarming in their softness, rendered with an effortless but assured use of line”.

Joan Kerr’s assessment:¹³³

“Rodius’s pencil and watercolour views of Sydney are smoothly proficient according to topographical conventions, and reaffirm his early training as a



40.

Charles Rodius (1802–1860) Del't, Printed by J Allen. Titled: *Jacky Jacky Expedition of Kennedy March 16th, 1849*. Lithograph, 33.7 x 25 cm. Collection: State Library of NSW PXA615 f38

buildings and recorded the growth of Sydney in delicate sketches and watercolours. His poignant image of convicts building the road over the Blue Mountains has come to symbolise the expansion of the colony, held up for many years by the mountain barrier, and the subsequent effect on the Indigenous tribes who had lived there for thousands of years.

He received an architectural award and was a lead singer at the first Oratorio held in Colonial Sydney. His singing ability was summed up by the press quotation: "The gentleman has no male competitor in the colony". Indeed, Rodius had very special talents.

Today his works are held by the British Museum, National Portrait Gallery of Australia, National Library of Australia, National Gallery of Australia, National Gallery of Victoria, State Library of NSW, State Library of Victoria, Hocken Collection University of Otago New Zealand and in private collections.

draughtsman. It was his crayon portraits however, which were particularly acclaimed by contemporary critics."

Regarding his portraits of the famous:

"His sketches of Leichhardt and other public figures such as Henry Parkes are characterised by their swift grasp of character, assured handling and economy of line and informality."

With respect to his portraits of Aboriginals:

"These portraits have a penetrating intensity which arises out of the artist's wish to portray the natives exactly as they appeared – somewhat wretched after living side by side with white colonists."

Conclusion

Rodius was one of the most talented residents of colonial Australia. A highly skilled artist, lithographer, architect and singer, he made a major contribution to Australian art and social history.

His accurate, sympathetic and beautiful sketches of NSW Indigenous leaders and their wives are his greatest legacy. The hopelessness, confusion, distress and anger of their expressions tells the story of the ruthless appropriation of lands and destruction of culture, by European settlers. He sketched, with equal skill, many of the famous and infamous settlers of early Colonial Sydney.

In addition, he painted important

In 1925, Rose Browne, the daughter of Thomas Alexander Browne (1825–1915) – better known as the novelist Rolf Boldrewood – reported her father's recollections of his schoolmasters at the Sydney College about 1840:¹³⁴

Our drawing master, Mr Rodius, a German artist, was a painter in water colour, and a limner of likenesses in crayon. In our family scrap album several water colour sketches are to be seen bearing the signature "C Rodius," also a portrait of the once celebrated aborigine Fisherman, Billy Blue, after whom Blue's Point in Sydney was named.



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Rodius née Wolffe, residing at 3889 Komadien Strasse Crue de la Comedie, in Cologne. Accessible No: 885/Anx. Perhaps Rodius changed his name from Chrétien to Charles. He sometimes signed "Ch. Rodius". His two known French works are signed "C Rodius" and "Ch'as Rodius". The West German Society of Family Studies stated that Charles Rodius was not born in Cologne, and, as French was obviously his mother tongue, he may have been born in France and gone to Cologne with his parents as a young child about 1802 or soon after. At that time, Cologne was occupied by Napoleon's Army and some thousand French soldiers and government officials lived with their families in Cologne.

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41.

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Charles Rodius (1802–1860), *Sir Henry Parkes*. Sydney, 1854, charcoal on paper, 18.4 x 13 cm, signed lower left "Chas Rodius 13 Jan'y 1854", inscribed bottom of image "Printers Conspiracy Police Officer". Collection: State Library of NSW a1528136u

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