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Time marches on but some bonds hold forever



Mistress Scarlett, at work in her bondage parlour in Chippendale.

Photo: *Steven Siewert*

Paul Bibby
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CHIPPENDALE rarely rates a mention in the glossy brochures and guide books used to entice wealthy tourists to Sydney.

Lying in the narrow strip between Central Station and Sydney University, the suburb tends to be dismissed as a former industrial precinct driven through on the way to somewhere else.

But a closer look reveals an array of colourful and disturbing tales - from gunslinging potato farmers and dodgy beer barons, to the 1981 shooting of the criminal Warren LanFranchi by the then policeman Roger Rogerson.

These legends of the inner city will live again tomorrow when an art exhibition, *Sordid Tales - A History Of Chippendale* opens at the NG Art Gallery. Inspired by the release of a new edition of the historian Shirley Fitzgerald's *Chippendale: Beneath The Factory Wall* and the looming redevelopment of the brewery most recently occupied by Carlton & United Breweries, the exhibition features works by 37 artists including Janet Lawrence, Wendy Sharpe and Nicholas Harding.

"It's an incredible, fascinating history - the stench and the poverty and the sadness, but also the incredible characters," its curator, Nicky Ginsberg, said. "I just got these incredible pictures in my head and started to wonder how this artist or that artist would interpret them."

Among the characters inspiring the artists was Robert Cooper, a convict-turned "entrepreneur" who ran a gin distilling racket and attempted to open a pleasure fair on Blackwattle Creek.

As one of Cooper's descendants writes: "His frequent court appearances have left a legacy of descriptions of this man, such as that of W.C. Wentworth, who wrote to Cooper's solicitor regretting that 'Mr Cooper, who is so liberal of his Gin to others, should not have indulged my client with a taste last night, instead of that taste he gave him of a bludgeon'."

Dr Fitzgerald said, "These are people who almost exist outside the historical record - people on the edge of society and on the edge of economy."

The exhibition also features present-day Chippendale locals who are continuing some of the suburb's traditions, among them Mistress Scarlett from The Kastle, one of Sydney's two licensed B&D (bondage and discipline) parlours.

"I love that we live in a colourful suburb," Mistress Scarlett said. "I think if you look behind a few doors in Chippendale there are still lots of interesting things going on ... Perhaps it's in a more sanitised, government-approved legal fashion, but it's still sordid."

Sordid Tales - A History Of Chippendale is at the NG Art Gallery, Chippendale, from tomorrow until August 16.

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