WANDLE INDUSTRIAL MUSEUM

BULLETIN



Fr David Pennells officiating at the New Year lunch

ISSUE 129 WINTER 2026

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WANDLE INDUSTRIAL MUSEUM

PRESIDENT
Harry Galley

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Chair: Fr David Pennells, Nicholas Hart, John Harding, John Hawks.

OPERATIONS TEAM
Alison Cousins, John Sheridan, Roger Steele, Michael Taylor.

Editorial

There is no shortage of designated months whose promoters hope to raise public awareness of good causes. This edition marks two such months, William Morris Month and Women's History Month. We are of course happy to celebrate both of these good causes at any time of the year, but this seemed a good opportunity to remind our readers that our Women of the Wandle exhibition is still running and to advertise the William Morris Month programme.

Readers may be aware that the Chair of the Museum's Trustees, Fr David Pennells, is retiring in July from his position of Vicar of Mitcham. We are pleased to learn that he will remain as Chair of Trustees for the foreseeable future.

John Sheridan

Cover picture: Ray Leyden
Photos:
Page 1: Auriel Glanville
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Operations Team Report

We ended the year with a get-together on December 14th prior to the regular Sunday opening slot in the hope of enabling more volunteers to pop in, and this was the case.



Our regular New Year lunch on January 4th at the Park Place Carvery was a success as usual and it was good to see Neville Squires restored to health and to catch up with Freddie Weaver's news. Our thanks to Roger Steele as usual for organising this.

At last – good news on the volunteer front. Joining Keith Davis, who started in the Autumn, we now have Roman Yastremskyi (Ukranian) volunteering on most Sundays, Alex Nelson, who has offered to work remotely on the cataloguing of Judy Goodman's digitised slides, and most recently Nicoleta Morea (Romanian), Luisa Dolce (Sicilian), Ethan Sanders (American) and Martyn Hayter.

Our Accreditation submission went in on January 14th, two weeks ahead of the deadline, having been collated in advance by Mick Taylor due to the Arts Council Grantium software being out of commission. Its receipt has been acknowledged but we have been advised that a response may take some months.

Our talks schedule has resumed and we are now booking as far ahead as February 2027. John Sheridan has revived Eric Shaw's talk about the Surrey Iron Railway. Demand is increasing immensely as are the distances we have to cover, but these are useful sources of additional income.

Alison Cousins attended what should have been a meeting of the South East London Museums Network in the London Museum Studios within the former Smithfield Market complex. However, the timing had to be changed so we were taken directly for a tour of the site starting in the Project Office to get hard-hatted, booted and gloved. Access was very complex and security tight. The total area comprises three floors with work in progress extensively on each. Original fittings had been saved where possible but stalls and bays had been mostly removed. The vast spaces reminded me of the areas of the Great Exhibition envisioned by the virtual software package currently being developed.

It was difficult to hear much of the tour guide due to the construction noise but we appreciated that we were lucky to be able to look around as tours have now been cancelled as they were felt to be disrupting the work although the various constructors were incredibly courteous and gave us priority on stairs etc. Photos were not permitted but as work progresses there will be updates on the museum website as the first phase is due for completion by the end of this year.

After several false starts we were at last able to do a presentation at the Merton Memory Hub, run on behalf of the Alzheimer's Society. Some small artefacts from the museum were taken along to show their significance to the local area. Sharon Seekings headed the morning class and she was happy for the format to be quite flexible. There was more feedback than expected with one gentleman insisting that William Morris of automobile fame was much more interesting to him than the one we are more familiar with. There then ensued a discussion on the various versions of the Morris Minor. Unexpected but interesting. The focus of the talk was on lavender, snuff, and Young's Brewery, with samples of the first two having been taken along and passed around. A repeat presentation has been requested.

On Saturday February 21st we had a stall at the Mitcham Arts Wellbeing Collective table sale at Mitcham Parish Church (photo below). We had several items donated to us which are of no relevance or are duplicates which we took along to sell (all of which our donors are happy for us to recycle).



Alison minding the stall

Alison Cousins

Women's History Month

Suzzana De Berdt
Garratt Mill, Wandsworth



The month of March has been designated Women's History Month, and 8 March is International Women's Day. This presents an opportunity to advertise the museum's current exhibition, ***Women of the Wandle***. The exhibition showcases a number of female business owners, as well as a contribution to women's trade union history.

This image from the exhibition commemorates Suzzana De Berdt, who ran Garratt Mill between 1709 and 1715, supplying gunpowder to the Ordnance Office.

The trade unionist commemorated in the exhibition is Mary Macarthur. The Corruganza Manufacturing Company on the River Wandle at Summerstown, Wandsworth, made boxes. In 1908 forty-four female workers in the tubular cardboard box department went on strike after a cut in their piecework rate and the summary dismissal of their forewoman after she protested.



This photograph gives a hint of Macarthur's forceful personality as she addresses a sceptical crowd from the foot of Nelson's Column. The rally raised sufficient funds to enable strike pay of 5 shillings a week to be paid.

Bulletins 111 and 119 have already discussed Mary Macarthur's role in supporting the strikers. She organized peaceful picketing of the works, negotiated with management, lobbied Corruganza's clients, astutely arranged publicity in the press to secure public support, and organized a procession and demonstration at Trafalgar Square on Saturday 22 August. The strike was resolved by conciliation, with both sides claiming victory.

John Sheridan

The Makepeace Family

One 'Woman of the Wandle' who does not figure in the exhibition is Eliza Makepeace. Her name appeared in the catalogues for both the Great Exhibition of 1851 and the International Exhibition of 1862. In 1851 Eliza lived at 7 Manor Street, Clapham. She was described in the 1851 catalogue as a "modeller" and her entry read:

> Models in wax – the *Lilium lancifolium speciosum* – from a plant grown by Mr Henry Groom. The *Gloxinia perryana* – from a plant in the possession of Sigismund Rucker, Esq., Wandsworth, Surrey. The *Cymbidium eburneum, and Phalaemopsis amabilis* – from plants in the possession of Conrad Loddiges, Esq., Hackney. The Rhododendron cunninghami, and improved method of preparing wax for flowers, etc.

In 1862 her entry read:

> Class IV (Animal and vegetable substances used in manufactures): Eliza Makepeace, Merton, Surrey: wax flowers, orchids, anatomised leaves, innocuous wax.

The same catalogue contained an entry for her husband Samuel Makepeace:

> Class III (Substances used for food): Samuel Makepeace, Merton, Surrey: preserved herbs, vegetables, and herbaceous mixtures, flavouring essences, etc.

Samuel (1812-1871) and Eliza (1822-1871) married in 1849. Samuel's father, also Samuel (1786-1859) was a textile printer at the Willow Lane Printing Works, Mitcham, between 1820 and 1845. According to the 1841 Census the elder Samuel, his wife Sarah (1781-1854) and their four

children and two servants lived at the works. Others - printers, clerks and designers and their families, presumably Samuel's employees - lived in the nearby Makepeace's Cottages. However, the elder Samuel was made bankrupt in November 1844. Calico printing along the Wandle was in terminal decline at that time. He quit the Willow Lane works in 1845.

His bankruptcy was annulled in March that year, possibly because he used the proceeds of sale of his business and property to pay his debts. In August 1846 he was the petitioning creditor in the bankruptcy of Henry Parnell, auctioneer, so perhaps he did not receive the full proceeds of the sale. The 1851 Census recorded a household at Figges Marsh comprising just him and Sarah and described his occupation as "Formerly calico printer" with the word "Formerly" seemingly crossed out. In 1846 and 1847 he placed newspaper advertisements for his new business of preparing culinary herbs and selling them wholesale and through retail outlets.

In May 1851 he was a "chemical agent" of Mitcham and an insolvent debtor. He may have evaded debtors' prison because bankruptcy notices in the press described his status as "Bail", "Adjourned prisoner" and "Rule". A prisoner "within the rules" was allowed to live outside the prison walls in a designated area. It is not clear when he was discharged from insolvency. He might have sold his Figges Marsh property because there is no record of the younger Samuel inheriting it. He died in 1859.

The younger Samuel was living at the printing works and working for his father in 1841. In 1851 he and Eliza were living in Clapham; he appears to have been described in the census as "Artist, drawer", although the census form is not easily legible. Eliza was an "Artist, modeller", which is consistent with her occupation as recorded in her Great Exhibition catalogue entry. In the 1861 Census Samuel was a "Herbalist, Gilder" and Eliza was an "Artist in wax modelling", both of them living in Merton Lane, Surrey, with their four children aged between three and eight.

In October 1867 Samuel was described in a press report of a dispute with a neighbour as a sauce manufacturer. The dispute was about his escaped geese, so perhaps a goose stock went into his sauce. At that time he was advertising his rich, full, brown and piquant 'Punch's Sauce'.

Samuel and Eliza both died in early 1871. The 1871 Census, taken in April, had their son Arthur Liddiard Makepeace, born in 1852 and aged 18, as head of the household. Also in the household were his brothers

Charles E G (born 1855) and Walter H (born 1856), and a visitor, Annie Makepeace, aged 22, who might have been there to help run the household after the deaths of their parents. Their sister Edith (born 1858) was not in the household. All three brothers were described as herbalists. It is not clear how long they carried on that business. Arthur later became a builder and decorator and died in 1938, and Charles became a naval armourer in Plymouth and died in 1912. Genealogy sites and online press archives give no further information about the lives of Walter and Edith.

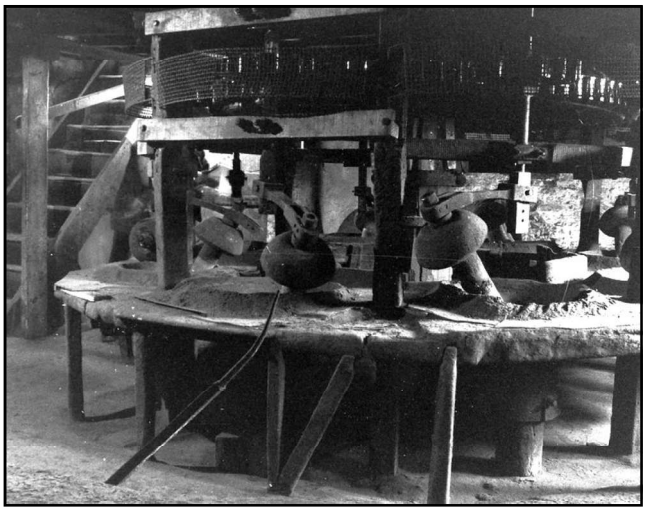
John Sheridan

Tobacco and the American Revolution

The American Revolutionary War took place between 1775 and 1783. It led to independence from Britain and the formation of the United States. The Declaration of Independence was signed on the 4th July 1776.

Since 1612 tobacco plants had been grown in the state of Virginia by the English settler John Rolfe. Whilst the indigenous people had grown native tobacco earlier, Rolfe introduced a sweeter Caribbean seed at Jamestown. This Caribbean seed was much favoured by the Spanish. The first major export of Virginia tobacco to England was in 1614. By the late 17th Century 20 million pounds weight was being exported to Britain. This peaked just before the American Revolution at 100 million lbs with a value of £900k. Under the Navigation Acts tobacco had to be shipped to Britain first before a large portion was re-exported to the rest of Europe.

Whilst there were tobacco and snuff mills elsewhere, the first on the River Wandle was on the Garth Estate (now Morden Hall Park) in 1750. There was later a second mill on the estate, along with tobacco and snuff mills at Ravensbury, Mitcham Bridge, Carshalton and Beddington. All would have used tobacco imported from Virginia.



Waterwheel-powered pestle and mortar snuff milling machinery

During the American Revolutionary War the British targeted the American tobacco industry. This was part of a strategy to disrupt the colonial economy and war effort. In 1780-1781, in what became known as The Tobacco War, British forces under Charles Cornwallis, Warren Phillips and Benedict Arnold launched a campaign in Virginia aimed at destroying the tobacco industry. In the towns of Petersburg, Manchester, Blandford and Osborne they destroyed 10,000 hogsheads of cured tobacco leaf (each hogshead weighs around 1,000 lbs). This included burning the curing barns and fields. Tobacco by now had become a major revenue source for the colonists to fund their war against Britain.

The British also used tobacco as leverage. Arnold offered to spare Richmond if the city gave up its tobacco supplies. This offer was refused by George Jefferson, the Governor, and the final result was the destruction of the tobacco. In addition to destroying tobacco British forces freed enslaved people, further disrupting the operations of the plantations.

As well as the land campaign the Royal Navy was seizing shipments of tobacco leaving American ports. While we do not know explicitly the effects the Tobacco War had on the tobacco and snuff mills on the Wandle there is no doubt in my mind that it would have affected them. The amount of tobacco that reached the mills would have been reduced. The quality of the tobacco may also have dropped. The reduction in the amount of tobacco available would have resulted in prices increasing and possibly smuggling of tobacco. Little is written about this or the other goods such as rice the American colonies were growing during the American Revolution. Certainly, Richard Holmes in his book *Rebels and Redcoats* makes only a passing reference to tobacco and other goods.

My thanks to our volunteer Gordon McKie for his research into this subject.

Mick Taylor

William Morris Month

William Morris Month is a new month-long celebration of William and May Morris, culminating in their birthdays on the 24th and 25th March respectively. It was the idea of Gabriella Esser, the director of the William Morris Society. It is a cooperative effort of the society and the William Morris Gallery, the V&A Museum, the Society of Antiquaries and others. It will comprise talks, displays, workshops and other events. If successful it should become an annual fixture. Details including the

programme of events and booking information are here: What's On - The William Morris Society.

Here is a summary the programme for the month:



Gabriella Esser

7 March, William Morris Society, Hammersmith, from 10am: opening celebration with talks, demonstrations and arts and crafts.

8/9 March, Standen House, East Grinstead, 11am-3pm: a display of archive documents and photos relating to the decoration by William Morris of this National Trust property.

11 March, William Morris Society, 1.30pm: Textile Tour with expert Sally Roberson. To include Emery Walker's house, and to be repeated monthly.

11 March, online and at New York University in London, 265 Strand, WC2R 1BH on behalf of the Victorian Society, 6.30pm: May Morris and the Art of Embroidery by Lynn Hulse.

14 March, Society of Antiquaries, Burlington House, Piccadilly, 10am: Morris Month Reading Walk, viewing London locations mentioned in Morris's novel *News from Nowhere.*

14 March, Wightwick Manor, Wolverhampton, 11am: talk by the curator on the lives and legacies of William and May Morris, and tour of the Morris-inspired National Trust property.

18 March, Voysey House, Chiswick, 10am: Behind the Scenes at Morris & Co. Tour, archive viewing, block printing workshop. Repeated at1pm. Morris & Co is now a subsidiary of Sanderson Design Group, which occupies the Arts and Crafts Voysey House.

18 March, Pre-Raphaelite Society, online, 7.30pm: talk by Prof Serena Trowbridge, entitled 'Pragmatic Feminism in May Morris's Plays'.

20 March, Society of Antiquaries, 11am: William Morris day - display, art workshops, library tour. Includes contributions from staff at Kelmscott Manor, which the society owns.

21 March, William Morris Gallery, 1pm: family day, Cosy Critters Workshop.

24 March, William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow, 11am: talk and tour to introduce Women in Print, a major exhibition marking the gallery's 75th anniversary. The exhibition covers the history of Liberty fabrics and their female designers including Althea McNish, Susan Collier and Sarah Campbell.

24 March, William Morris Society and online, 12.30pm: lecture by David Mabb entitled 'Appropriation and the Critique of Capitalist Aesthetics in the Reworking of William Morris Design, 1999-2025'. (Perhaps this asks what Morris would have thought about the commercialisation of his work, but who knows?)

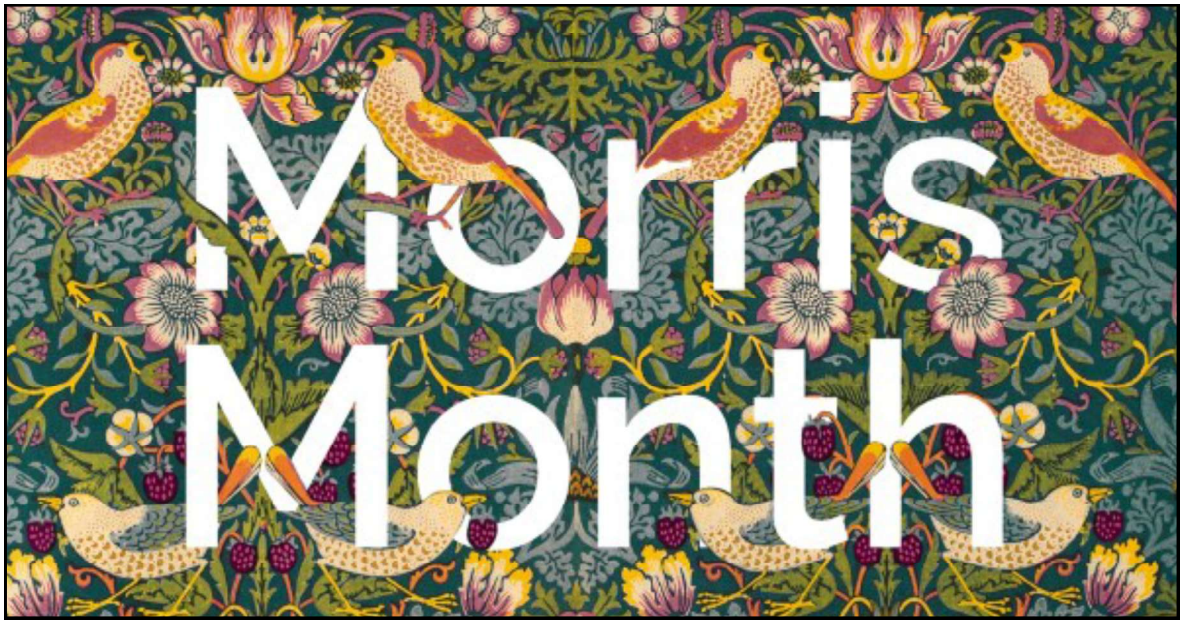
24 March, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, 2pm: May Morris's embroidery designs print room visit. Repeated at 3pm.

25 March, Society of Antiquaries, 6pm: talk by Freddie Yauner entitled 'Towards a Morris Manifesto: How Living Like William Morris Can Improve your Life and the World'.

26 March, V&A Museum, 1pm: lunchtime lecture by Jenny Lister, 'William Morris: Pattern Revolutionary'.

27 March, V&A Museum and online, 10.30am: one day course entitled 'William Morris, Designer Extraordinary'.

It is an interesting and imaginative programme which deserves our support and best wishes.



John Sheridan

Forge: Industries of Croydon

The Museum of Croydon's website contains the following succinct description of an exhibition in one of the museum's special galleries:

> '***Forge: Industries of Croydon*** celebrates the people, places, and innovations of industry in the borough, past and present. Along with an overview of iconic factories, the exhibition explores three industrial themes – fabric, metal and brewing.
>
> At the core of the display are images of Addington blacksmiths forge, taken by local photographer Lee Williams. Dating back to 1740, the forge is still in full use and Lee's photographs reveal behind-the-scenes of a traditional industry that continues to thrive.
>
> Visit us at the Museum of Croydon to explore Croydon's rich industrial past that has forged the town as we know it today. From its rural roots to its factories and power stations, Croydon companies have been making products for centuries.'

The exhibition consists mainly of information panels and photographs. Of the few artefacts on display the main one is a real bubble car, one of 6,000 assembled at the Trojan factory in Croydon between 1962 and 1965.



The story begins with Croydon's early modern origins as a rural market town on the River Wandle and a coaching stop between London and the south coast. From these origins blacksmiths, farriers, carriage builders and brewers emerged, together with dye-making, textile printing and leather working. Natural resources were utilised for brickmaking and gravel extraction. Metal working developed into production engineering and industrial manufacturing. A gasworks served factories as early as 1827. The railways brought new transport links in the 19th century.

Croydon became an urban centre with industry concentrated along Purley Way. In the 1920s Croydon Airport brought opportunities for international trade. Wartime saw a change of focus to the manufacture of ordnance.

Industries come and go but factories continue to thrive, producing foodstuffs, building supplies, lamps, umbrellas, musical instruments and more. The exhibition concludes with the ringing declaration that today Croydon is home to 14,000 businesses and is a hotspot of tech innovation; and the borough's regeneration programme aims to strengthen the local economy, supporting makers and encouraging industry to grow in new directions.

Just one quibble: the exhibition does not mention the Surrey Iron Railway. An information panel does say that the area became better connected with the opening in 1809 of the London & Croydon Canal. The canal took business away from the SIR, and the canal itself was swept away and replaced by a steam railway by the 1830s. The SIR was not a great success, but an acknowledgement of its founders as pioneers of industrial transport links between Croydon and central London would not have gone amiss.





The exhibition closes on 31 May. The museum is located in the Croydon Clocktower, Katharine Street, CR9 1ET.

John Sheridan

Leather Bottle Pubs

There are two Leather Bottle pubs close to the River Wandle, one in Kingston Road, Merton, and one in Garratt Lane, Wandsworth. Both date from the early 18th century, although the Kingston Road pub was rebuilt in 1897. The Garratt Lane Leather Bottle was the scene in the 18th century of satirical mock elections of the 'Mayor of Garratt'; and was used as a refreshment halt for the horse-drawn Surrey Iron Railway (SIR), which operated between 1803 and 1846, conveying raw materials and finished goods between Wandle mills and the River Thames. Both pubs reopened in 2024 following refurbishment.

In the distant past, leather bottles were used as drinking vessels for water, carried by travellers and refilled from wells at inns along main routes. The Leather Bottle pubs might have been named after that activity. The well at the Garratt Lane Leather Bottle would also have been used to fill the pub's trough to refresh the SIR horses.

The alternative is that the pubs were associated with Wandle mills that made leather bottles, but there do not seem to have been any leather works near either pub.

Here's a history of leather drinking vessels:
https://www.hidebound.co.uk/blog/post/a-brief-history-of-leather-drinking-vessels/



Garratt Lane



Kingston Road, Merton

John Sheridan

Iron Horse



This cast iron art sculpture was installed in Rotary Field, Purley, in January 2020, on the route of the Surrey Iron Railway. At 12 metres long it is a full size replica of an SIR horse and wagons in two dimensions. The mayor of Croydon presided over the opening ceremony and Christchurch Purley hosted a reception. The sculptor was Glasgow-based Alan Potter (b 1949), who specialises in public art. He won a competition run by Croydon Council. Croydon's budget for the project was £30,000.

John Sheridan

Dates for the Diary

All welcome at these events

7 March, Croydon Library, 2.30pm: talk by John Sheridan, **Liberty Mills.**
17 March, West Barnes Library, 10.30am: talk by Mick Taylor for Women's History Month, **Women of the Wandle.**
7 April, Shirley Community Library Group, 2pm: talk by Mick Taylor, **The River Wandle**.
10 April, WIM, 2.30pm: Merton Historical Society workshop.
29 April, Wimbledon Guild, 10.30am: talk by Alison Cousins, **Lavender**.
9 May, Carshalton and District History and Archaeological Society, 2.30pm: talk by Alison Cousins, **William Kilburn**, calico printer and floral artist.
22 May, WIM, 2.30pm: Merton Historical Society workshop.
29 May, Wandsworth Historical Society, Quaker Meeting House, Wandsworth High Street, 8pm: talk by Mick Taylor, **Around Wandsworth.**

INVESTING IN VOLUNTEERS
IN THE WANDLE VALLEY

ACCREDITED MUSEUM

Accreditation Mentor: Emma Harper, Charles Dickens Museum Service.
Museum Adviser: Yvette Shepherd, The London Museum.

The Wandle Industrial Museum, the Vestry Hall Annexe, London Road, Mitcham, Surrey CR4 3UD. Tel: 020 8648 0127

Company No 01792482, Charity No 288655.

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OPEN: Every Wednesday 1 ~ 4 pm;
Every Sunday 2 ~ 5 pm.
(The Museum is closed Bank Holiday weekends)

The Museum is also open to schools and groups by appointment.

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Free Admission. Donations welcome.

The Wandle Industrial Museum would like to point out that the views of contributors to this newsletter are not necessarily the views of the Museum. We would be happy to give the right to reply to anyone who finds the content contentious.

All contributions and news items gratefully received and appreciated - please feel free to let us know at any time - telephone or write or email to office@wandle.org

You can find us on: