Time for a spring clean. I am currently reworking all my web pages, with a better tree structure, proper navigation, and a new look and feel. Click here for a sneak preview of work in progress. The new look has also been applied to this newsletter. Many readers will lament the demise of the Johnston text on the logo, but I’ve never liked mixing fonts, and have no intention of adopting Johnston site-wide. I prefer something more neutral politically, and have always had a soft spot for a good geometric sans.

Date for your diary
- On Friday April 7th I will be presenting a short paper: Digitising Schematic Maps: Recreating or Reinventing History at the Second International Workshop on Exploring Old Maps (EOM 2017) at the Universität Würzburg, Germany.

Map research
- A preprint of the EOM paper has been added to my academic publications list, now comprising eleven papers.
- Peter Lloyd has recently been discussing the links between schematic mapping and the abstract art of Piet Mondrian.

Web page news
- Map of the Month has been added to my poster shop in the Paris and Decorative sections, available for purchase print-on-demand.

Map of the Month: Art Nouveau Paris Metro
The Paris Metro is famous for its elegant, dramatic, vaguely sinister Art Nouveau station entrances, designed by Hector Guimard, and installed on the first batches of lines to be constructed. Unfortunately, the imagery is superficial, with the creations grafted on, virtually as an afterthought, to an almost-completed system dominated by reflective plain white tiles and simple lettering. Beneath the surface, there is probably less Art Nouveau influence on the Paris Metro than the London Underground, but it is the Paris Metro that is the more celebrated. Perhaps this is just as well. Guimard’s fantastical lettering would surely be insufficiently legible for widespread use, and just imagine the entire Paris Metro styled to match the entrances; the stuff of children’s nightmares.

For a decorative map, legibility doesn’t matter of course (nor scariness), and I’ve created Art Nouveau inspired maps for London and Essex, and received attempts to persuade me to create one for Brussels, but a year ago, an email from a newsletter reader led me to think again about Paris.

What has been holding me back? Elaborate decorative maps run into problems for extensive networks, with the detail lost, except for printouts at the very largest sizes. The solution is to create a decorative map for the historic network, set in an appropriate decade when the system was far less extensive. Alternatively, a smaller network sometimes works well, especially if a designer is associated with a particular city, such as Chicago or Glasgow. An Art Nouveau map of the Paris Metro works better if set in a more historically appropriate period such the early 1910s.

The real difficulty for a decorative Paris map is using Guimard’s unique lettering. Anything else would be inappropriate, but until recently a good digitised version has been unavailable. RATP has its own, jealously guarded font for heritage work, and a search for “Paris Metro” on the major font sales web sites reveals only the rather clunky, blocky version of Guimard’s lettering, somewhat lacking in elegance. Then, in 2014, Jonathan Wilkinson, a USA designer, produced his own font, faithfully derived from the original lettering in Paris.
My Art Nouveau inspired map of the London Underground was created in 2009, and both this one and the new Paris design have a botanical theme, so how much has changed in the last eight years? I have always been pleased with the tangles, which nicely symbolise the interchanges and are absorbing to create. For stations, the transition from abstract/repeated buds/thorns to individually created leaves represents my desire for individual crafting rather than easy cookie cutter patterns, but when I tried simple leaves on the Paris Metro map I was dissatisfied. The first rule of map design is: if any design feature overtly causes concern, rework it: the effort will always be rewarded. Hence, after some initial publicity, my first design vanished for almost a year, while I attempted something more in keeping with the effect I desired. The station leaves took weeks to get right, but were worth every minute.

And here is the result. The line colours are inspired by today’s network, the whiplash curves that characterise Art Nouveau are captured well, and now the station leaves are much more in keeping with the overall theme. The sumptuousness and ambiguity of Art Nouveau leaps off the page and ... Guimard’s lettering is astonishingly, almost shockingly legible. Perhaps more widespread use should have been made of it on the Paris Metro after all.

My New Year’s resolution is going well, another pending map is finally completed. Map of the Month for April should be another design from my in-tray, and I have given myself a choice of three to work on. To find out which one I decide on, subscribe to my newsletter at www.tubemapcentral.com.

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