Summer is behind us and my new web pages are finally live. Do take a look at www.tubemapcentral.com. There is plenty of new content, and they have been also designed to be easy for me to correct and keep up to date. More importantly, the bigger change that I have been alluding to in past newsletters is finally complete. After many years based in the small Essex riverside town of Wivenhoe, Tube Map Central is moving down the line to the elegant Victorian seaside resort of Walton-on-the-Naze. Apologies for the late mailing, not helped by the dreadful state of the British telecoms business. This newsletter has been finished and waiting to be dispatched for weeks, and the October one will be following soon.

**Dates for your diary**

- The [London Transport Museum](https://www.ltmuseum.co.uk) will be hosting a late debate: *Technology and the Future* on November 29th, 18:45 to 22:00 at Covent Garden (Covent Garden Piazza, WC2E 7BB). I will be taking part, and there will be full details in the October newsletter.
- I will be giving my talk *Transit Maps: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* to the University of the Third Age Broomfield and District branch on Wednesday 9th May 2018, 14:30, at Broomfield Village Hall, Main Road, Broomfield, Chelmsford, CM1 7AH.

**Map of the Month: Something to hang on the wall**

My new house was built in 1905, and it lends itself well to Arts & Crafts decor, with Art Nouveau flourishes where I can get away with them. I might have a few suitable maps already that I can use to decorate the walls to good effect, but it seemed fitting to create something especially to mark the move, and so the September Map of the Month will be a little bit more self-indulgent than usual.

As I note in my book, *Underground Maps Unravelled*, although the London Underground was an early pioneer of the creation of fully integrated corporate identity, the elements of this were assembled piecemeal, much more slowly than a modern organisation wishing to reinvent itself would roll out its new image. Underground identity development was sporadic to say the least. Hence, soon after Edward Johnston crafted a new modern sans serif alphabet to unify lettering system-wide, several retrograde station ticket halls were built along the Northern Line extension to Edgware resembling mock-Greek temples. System publicity was very diverse and far from unified in style, with bold modernistic imagery awkwardly rubbing shoulders with designs inspired by the Arts & Crafts movement. Homely and charming perhaps, but nonetheless a throwback to a bygone era. Even the Underground map succumbed, for a brief time sacrificing usability for artistry.

Macdonald Gill, famous for his intricate decorative maps, also created a series of plainer ones in the early 1920s for navigating the Underground. Line configurations were geographical, typical of the times, but the maps were distinctive for their decorative borders and elaborate, florid script-style hand lettering. A card folder produced in 1921 showed just Central London in a compact space, a perfect Arts & Crafts basis for a map designer to decorate his home, even one built 16 years before the map was published.
Readers of my recent paper on digitising historic maps will know the anachronistic pitfalls that await the unwary, with station names being particularly problematic. Hand-lettering, with its variability and intricate form is almost impossible to replicate convincingly via computerised fonts, and it would be futile to try. Trawling through thousands of script fonts in the hope that one might vaguely resemble the letterforms to be impersonated is unlikely to yield anything remotely suitable, and that leaves just two options: (1) try to recreate the lettering myself digitally; or (2) cheat.

I did have a go at an alphabet based on the original lettering, but couldn't quite finish the job. The distinctive flourishes would have given the map an other-worldly Art Nouveau appearance, but this is supposed to be a map of London, not Middle Earth, and although quaint and pretty, the original is a legibility disaster. Some of the lettering on the original is plainer than the rest, and looking for Late 19th/Early 20th century fonts that might be able to capture its shape and spirit, I discovered Italian Old Style created by Monotype in 1911 but derived from William Morris’ own typeface (his Golden Type) used for book publishing. Perfect, I have a conceptual connection between font and map and, although more sober in appearance, the bold italic isn’t a million miles away from the basic forms of the original hand-lettered station names.

I cheated, but so what! This is a map intended for my own wall, and so I have the ultimate artist’s licence. And, who knows? What if Frank Pick, who did so much to shape London Transport’s corporate identity, had departed from the Underground in the early 1920s, and his replacement had been skeptical of modernism? The Arts & Crafts Underground maps did have legibility problems, but typesetting would be an obvious solution. With the design aspirations of the organisation teetering between looking back to the past and forward to the future, anything might have been possible.

If any readers are brave enough to attempt to create a font based on Macdonald Gill’s handwriting, do let me know how you get on. My design studio is currently in the process of being reassembled, so research and production can hopefully recommence soon. I see that my 50th edition newsletter is approaching rapidly, subscribe to them at www.tubemapcentral.com to see how I intend to mark the occasion.

Max Roberts, mjr@tubemapcentral.com