A belated welcome to the new decade. Restarting after the long Christmas break is never easy but now I am back into the swing of things. Last year my focus was writing books, this year it is academic papers.

Book news

I am down to my last few boxes of *Underground Maps Unravelled* and would like to make some space, so all prices have been reduced until my supplies get low. These are now £25 for delivery to the UK, £35 for delivery to the European mainland, and £40 for delivery to the rest of the world. These are the lowest international prices I have ever offered, so take advantage of them while you can.

Also in the news, we are delighted to announce that *Airline Maps: A Century of Art and Design* has been shortlisted for the Edward Stanford Travel Writing Awards 2020 (illustrated travel books category). The winner will be announced on February 26th, so fingers crossed!

Web Page News

In the writing section of my web pages, there are a number of informal articles covering topics ranging from the recent changes in Amsterdam, to the difficulties of adding supplementary information to a map. I am now going through the slow process of converting these from html to self-contained pdf files, several have been uploaded already and the rest will follow this year.

Dates for your diary

The third Schematic Mapping Workshop will be held on 15th/16th April, 2021, at Universität Würzburg, Germany. The basic workshop website is complete and includes the full scope and submission timetable. The portal for submissions opens on Thursday 9th April 2020, and we are happy to take questions about these at submissions@schematicmapping.org. Reports on all aspects of schematic map research are most welcome.

I will be giving a presentation with Mark Ovenden, based on my two recent books, titled From tourist guides to airline maps: Beck connections worldwide to the London Underground Railway Society, Tuesday 10th March 2020, 18:40, Upper Room, Allsouls Clubhouse, 141 Cleveland Street, London W1T 6QG.

In the media, on the web

There is a nice Tube Map Travels article in the Londonist, and I was interviewed for the Robert Elms show on BBC Radio London. Space precludes all the links for Airline Maps, so I will catch up on these in the February newsletter.

Map of the Month: Crossrail conundrums

Looking back at my 75 newsletters, I was surprised that a sensible attempt at the London Underground network has never featured as Map of the Month. There have been plenty of silly ones, but nothing that I would recommend for everyday use. This is partly because *Underground Maps Unravelled* is full of London visualisations, and also because the massive Thameslink and Crossrail projects were
supposed to transform travel in London. I therefore wanted the network to stabilise before I revisited it. Thameslink is not part of the London Underground but it now offers trains across central London at frequencies equivalent to the Circle and Hammersmith and City Lines.

I was prompted to come out of hibernation by the truly dreadful official maps that are now being released. They have twisting line trajectories, lack balance and are very distorted. Successive attempts to squeeze in more and more services have resulted in a design that fails every usability criterion, and you have to wonder just how bad it is going to get before the people responsible decide that a fresh start is needed.

Problem 1 is the need to add Crossrail to the map in a convincing way. Henry Beck himself knew that new lines needed to be shown in the best possible light. Problem 2 is the requirement for maps to be spatially informative now that there is widespread acceptance that out-of-station interchanges are an integral part of London travel. The official map pre-dates Oyster, when these were less straightforward and frequent, and so there was never a design priority for maps to be spatially informative. Now, at the very least, neighbouring stations need to be shown nearby on the map, especially relative to distant stations.

I am very happy with how Crossrail has turned out on my own design. It has nice trajectories, absolutely no topographical weirdness, and no spurious River Thames crossings. Making the map spatially informative has caused some untidiness, but this is nothing compared with a slavishly topographical map, and I defy readers to identify anywhere in which the layout is misleading. Thameslink has been incorporated neatly as the first step towards adding the rest of London’s railways. Because the map is spatially sound, the work will be finding a little bit of extra space for new additions rather than mass reconfiguration.

I never put my maps forward as perfect solutions, but the design here definitely points towards one possible future for London. I have several unfinished maps in my in-tray at the moment, to make sure that you see which one makes it to the next newsletter, subscribe at www.tubemapcentral.com.

Max Roberts, mjr@tubemapcentral.com