



Tube boss Paul Godier looks out over the plaque. Photo by Hugh Petrie.

Blue Plaque for Finchley Genius

Harry Beck, who lived at number 60 Court House Gardens, West Finchley for many years, was England's most important contributor to graphic communication. There is little doubt that the tube map which we all know, provided not only an elegant explanation of London's underground railway, but also an icon and model recognised the world over. When the car company Audi chose the top ten designers of the 20th century, Harry Beck was there.

Route master

Tube maps were based on maps of London. But in the 1920s services expanded rapidly. The important stations and interchanges in central London were crammed into a small space in the centre of the maps. What Beck did was radical, and his 'plan', though modified, is still in use today. All the stations are shown at uniform distances from each other, and the only landmark is the river Thames. Interchanges, circles, are clearly distinguished from small nodes representing ordinary stations. This enabled Beck to expand the centre of the map and make everything clear. A simple idea yes; but isn't that the nature of true insight.

Simply elegant

Finchley Society invited

friends and important people to the unveiling, including the Mayor of Barnet, and Dennis Sanger, Group Station Manager for Finchley, and many from the Society. The local press were there, including photographer Peter Beale of the Hendon and Finchley Times. Graphic Design Historian Ken Garland was signing copies of his book, and made a fine speech. One person who required no invitation, and for whom the day was extra special was Delfina T Brooks, the current resident. Ms Brooks made everyone welcome and provided tea and cake in the garden. A modest, but given Beck's shyness, a fitting celebration of one of England's less well known, but no less important, geniuses.

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