

SELF PORTRAIT



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Setting up a self-portrait activity was a key ingredient for many community arts projects, offering the opportunity to create an image of yourself, get a copy of the photograph and to be part of an almost instantaneous exhibition.

In Sandwell, by 1978 Jubilee Arts had a double-decker bus with a chemical darkroom, where negatives could be processed and black and white photographs produced for showing the next day, often attached to sheets of cardboard or a washing line. They had one 35 mm Pentax camera, which was passed around. The Bus was also used as a print studio, a meeting space, as a mobile film unit and many other things. Often, with great excitement, people ran the self-portrait activity themselves, as you can see by the occasional askew framing of some of these images.

At other times, Jubilee ran photographic sessions with local community organisations, inviting them to portray their friends and neighbours. The immediate point of point of reference for community arts groups like Jubilee was the 1979 'Handsworth Self-Portrait' organised by Derek Bishton, Brian Homer and John Reardon, who also founded 10-8 photographic magazine, who built a stall on Grove Lane with a simple studio set-up – a 35mm camera mounted on a tripod and a backdrop – and signs in Punjabi, English, Urdu, inviting passers-by to take their own portrait.

Today this form of portraiture has mutated into the taking of Selfies – every minute some 46,740 photographs are uploaded to Instagram alone – but the sharing of self-portraits pre-dates the internet. These Jubilee photographs come from a seemingly far less self-conscious era. They provide a quite remarkable record of the way we were. They are sourced from the Jubilee Arts Archive 1974-1994, a substantial collection of negatives and slides conserved by Sandwell Community History and Archives Service. The photographs were taken by Jubilee Arts & Theatre Company, primarily as documentation of their projects in Sandwell and the Black Country and further afield. They were made by artists and project participants, both professional and amateur photographers. The particular selections here are from sessions in West Bromwich and Tipton, the former facilitated by Peter Singh and the latter by Cynthia Woodhouse, Derek Jones and Peter Chaplin.

It's difficult to imagine, but half a century ago very few people had access to a camera, let alone a computer. The first computer store in the world opened in 1975, in a rundown neighbourhood in West Los Angeles, and the following year Apple Computer Company was founded. Back when phones were still attached to walls and photographs were physical objects.

www.jubileeartsarchive.com

Oak Road, West Bromwich, 1985





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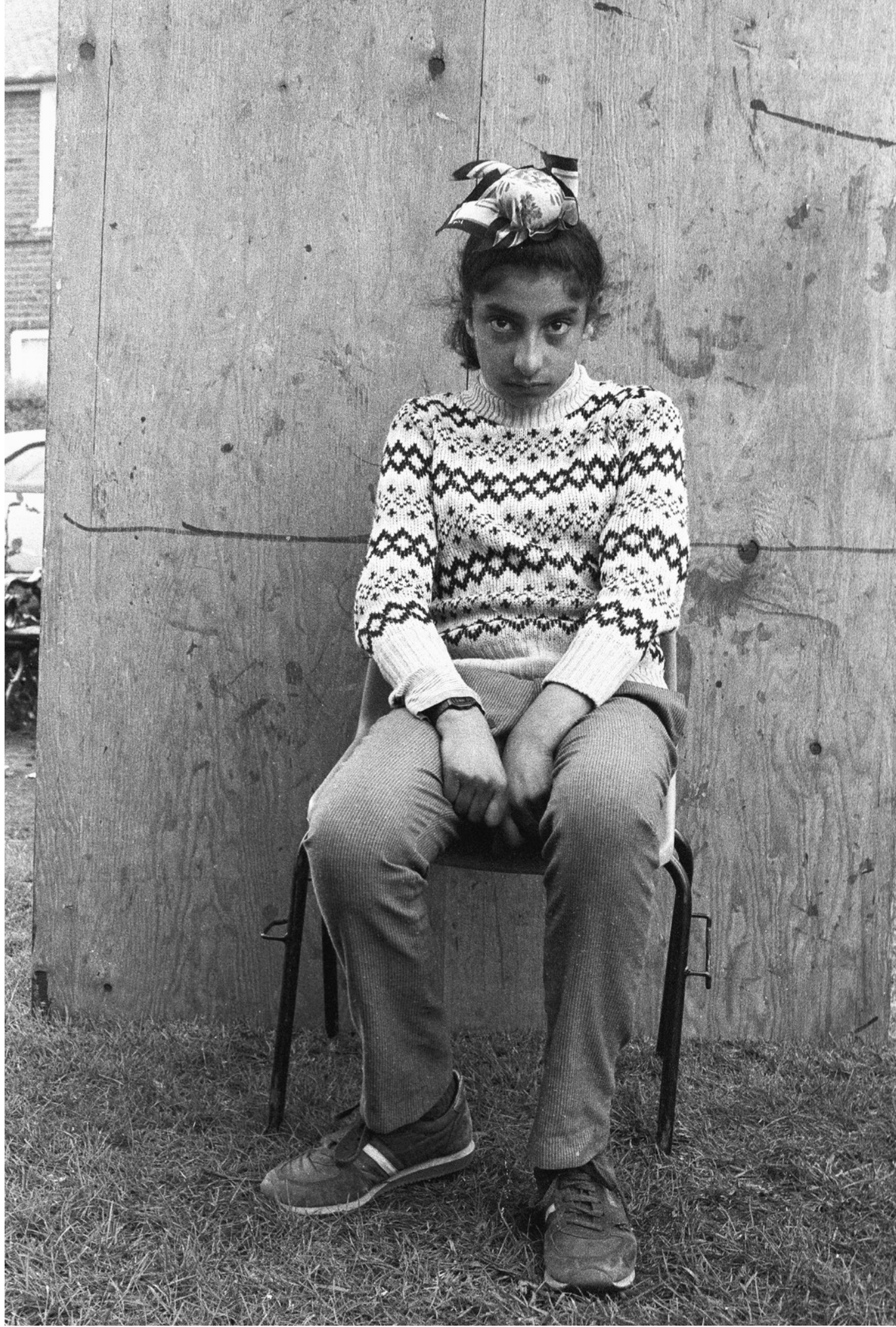
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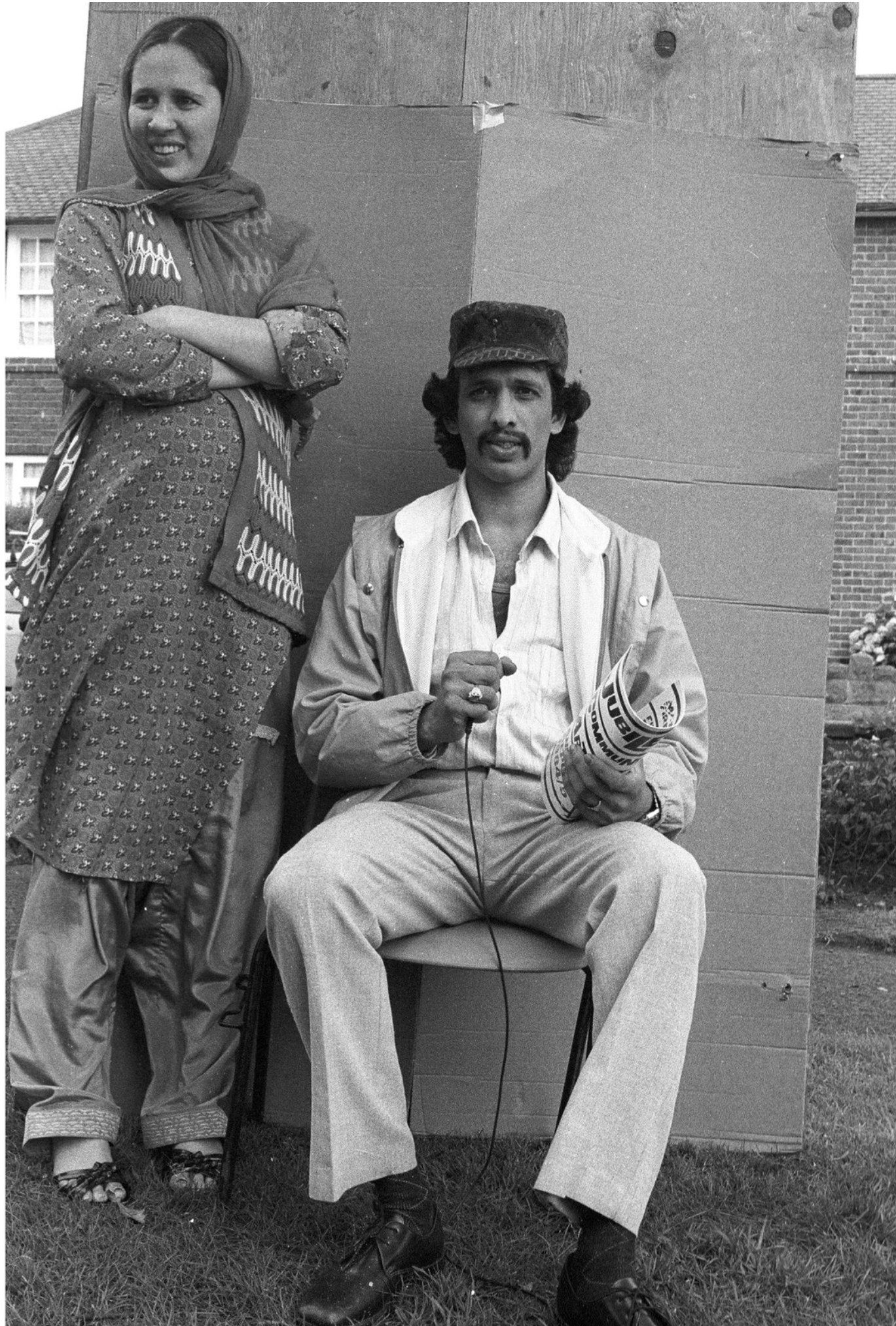


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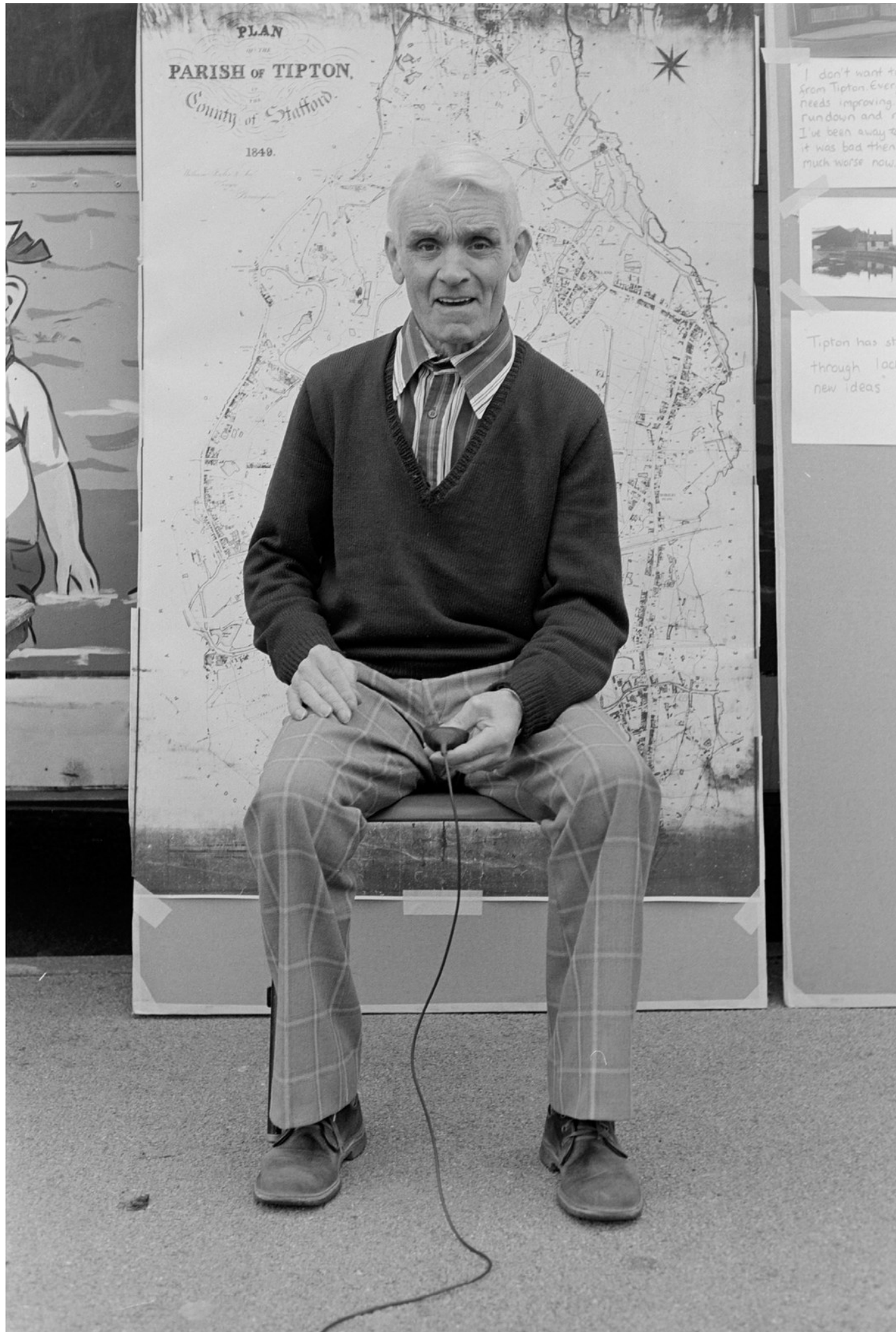
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Owen Street, Tipton, 1983





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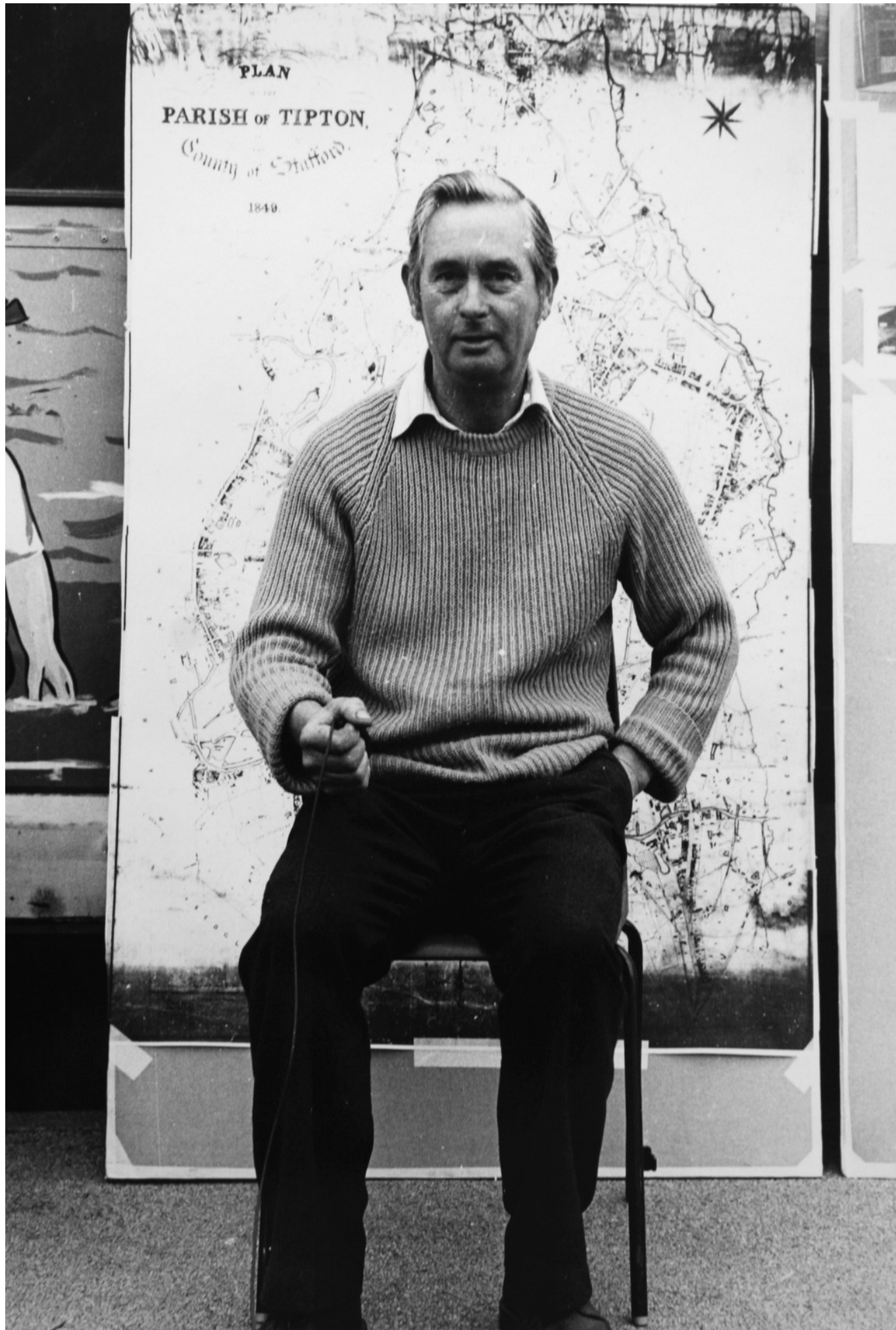
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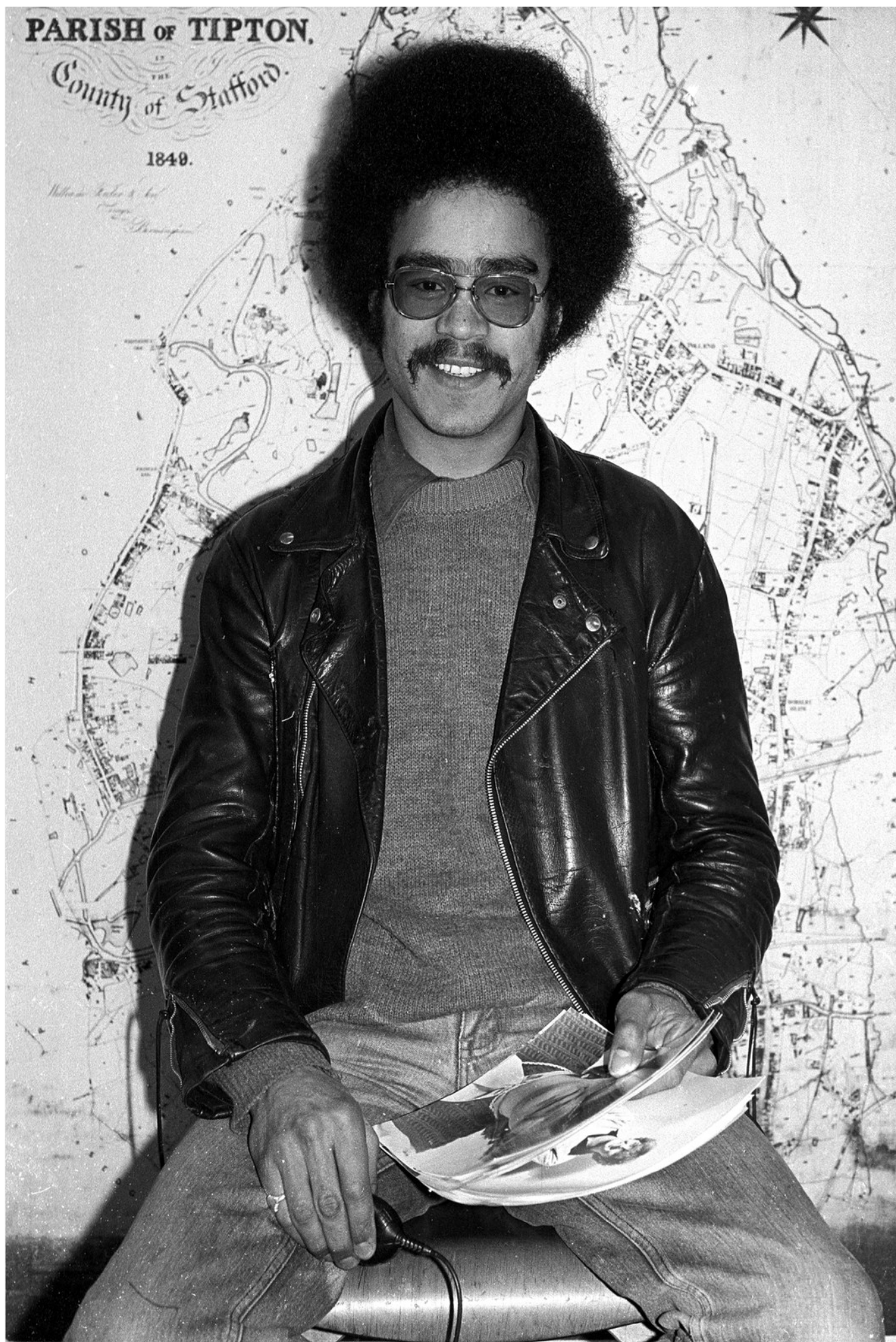
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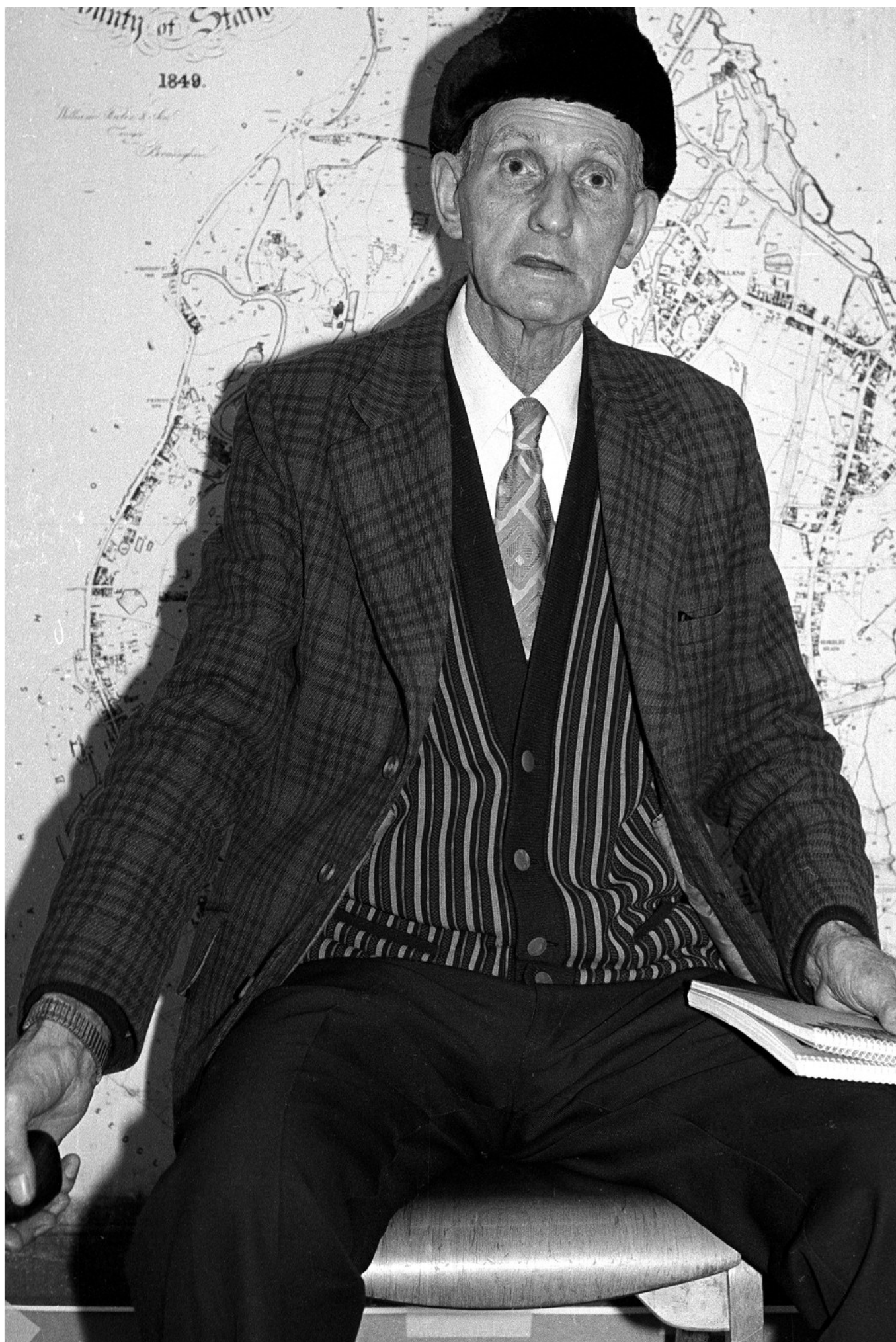




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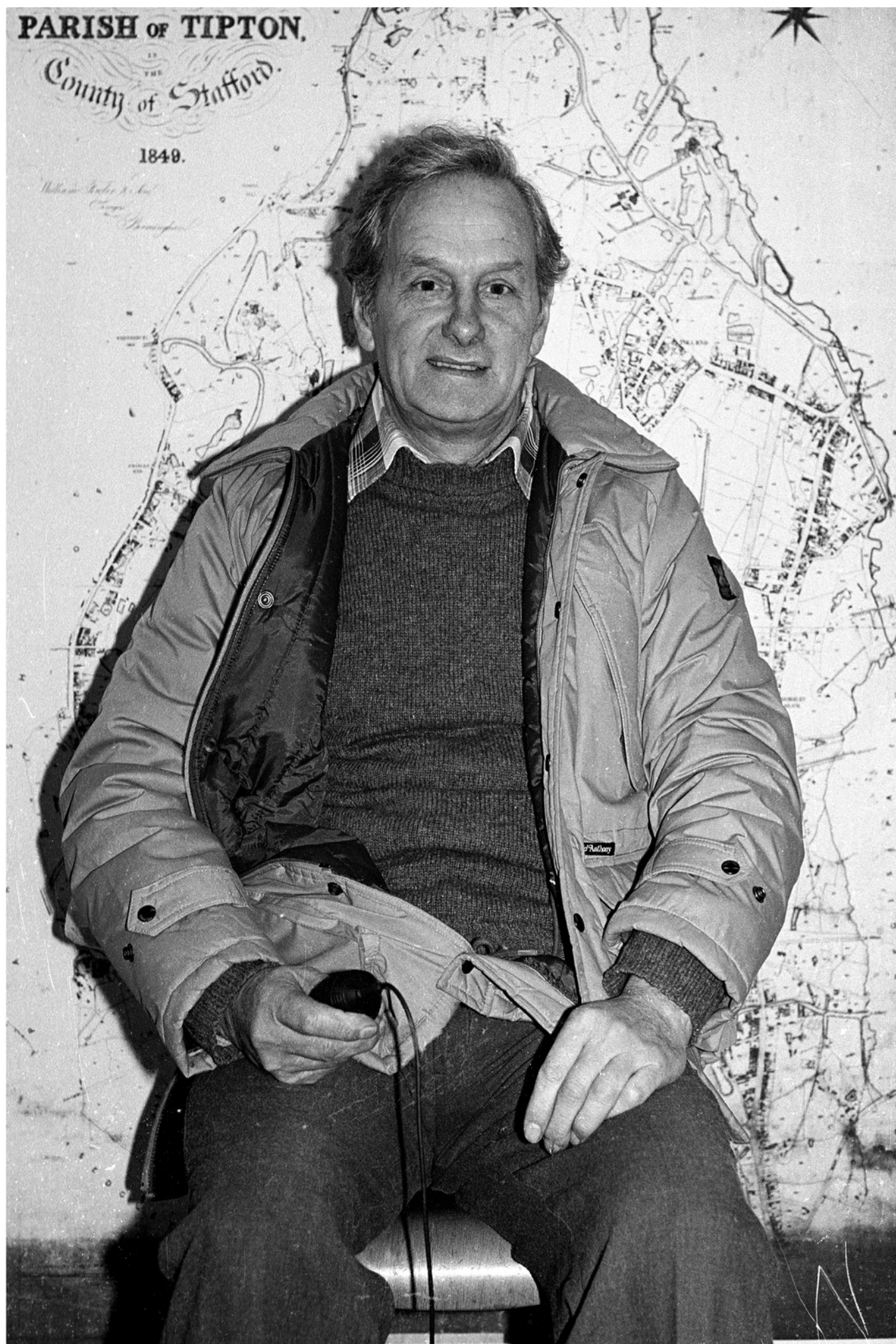
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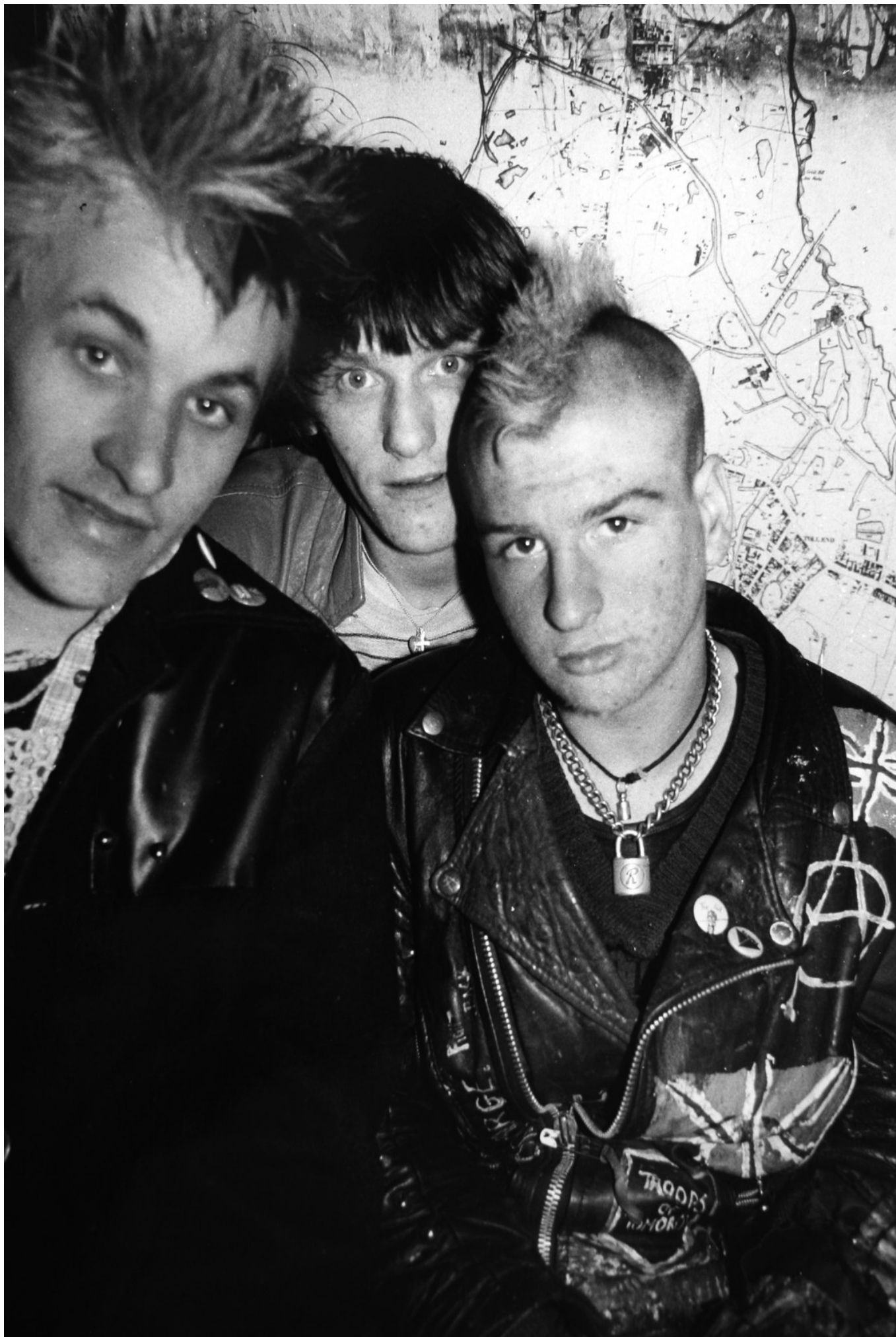




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This selection of self-portraits from the Jubilee Arts Archive would have originally been processed and printed in the darkroom of the Jubilee PlayBus (top and right), or at a darkroom Jubilee helped set up on the West Smethwick Estate with Community Links (bottom left).





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