

Service

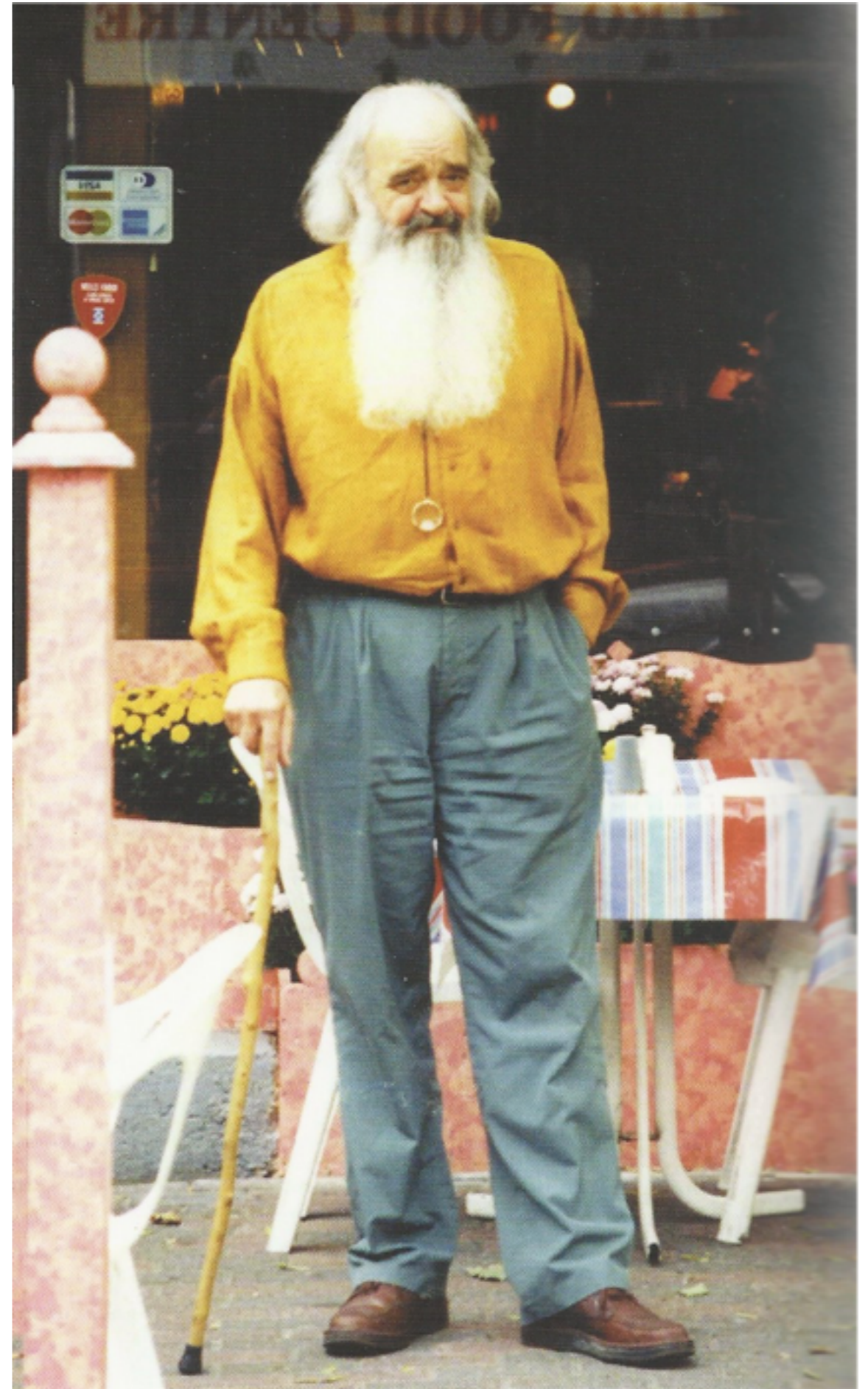


Personal Reflections on Stafford Beer

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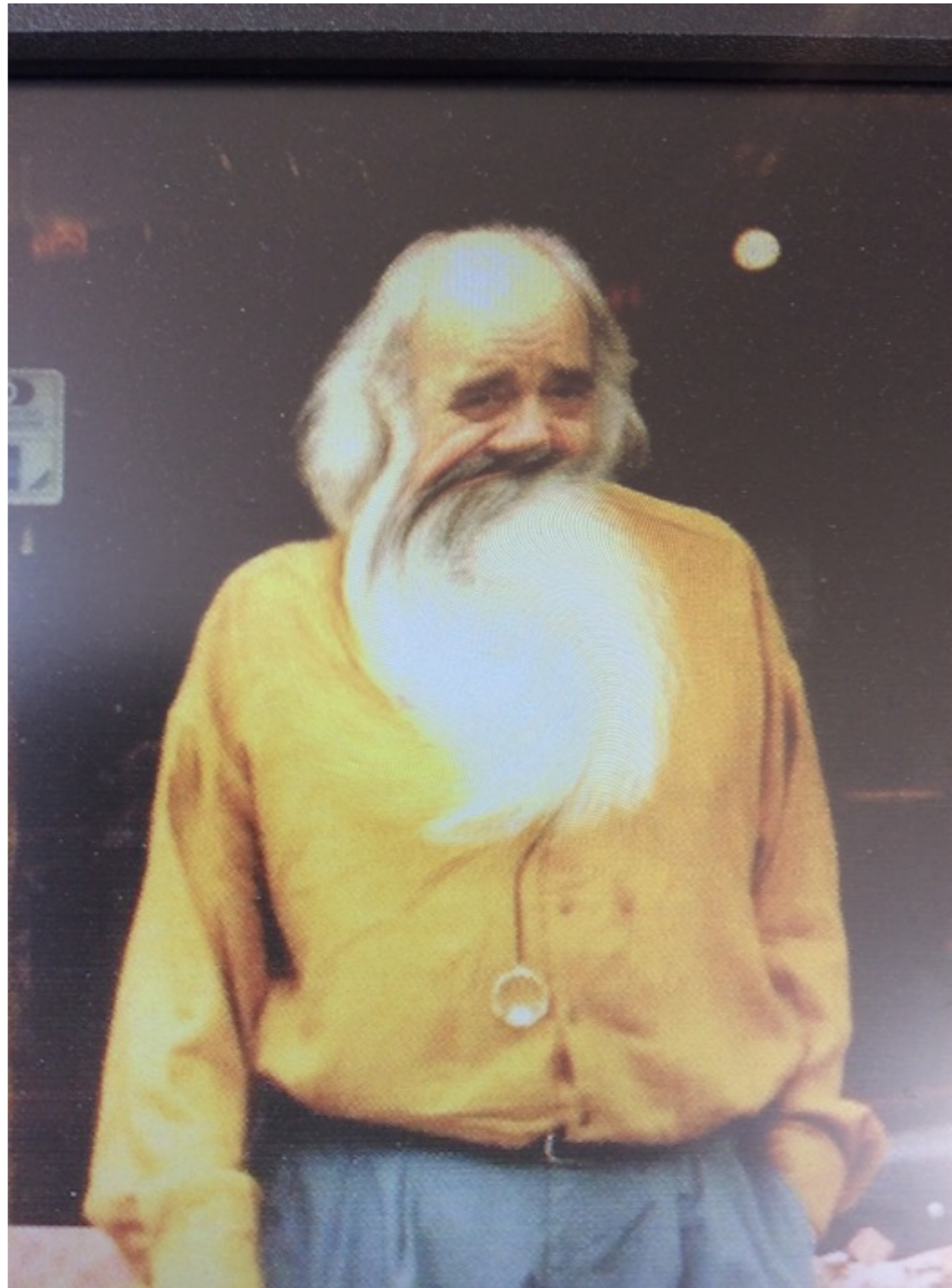
Stafford as I knew him

- This is what Stafford looked like when I first met him.



What Kind of Mirror am I?

- The Boundaries of the System observed are determined by the purpose of the observer
- I hope these personal reflections don't distort Stafford's image too much!



One of the Most brilliant Minds of the 20th Century

- Alan Turing was not well known until recently, but is now recognised as a significant figure.
- Stafford Beer was at least as significant, but remains almost unknown.
- Why?

Why was I interested in Stafford's Work? - 1

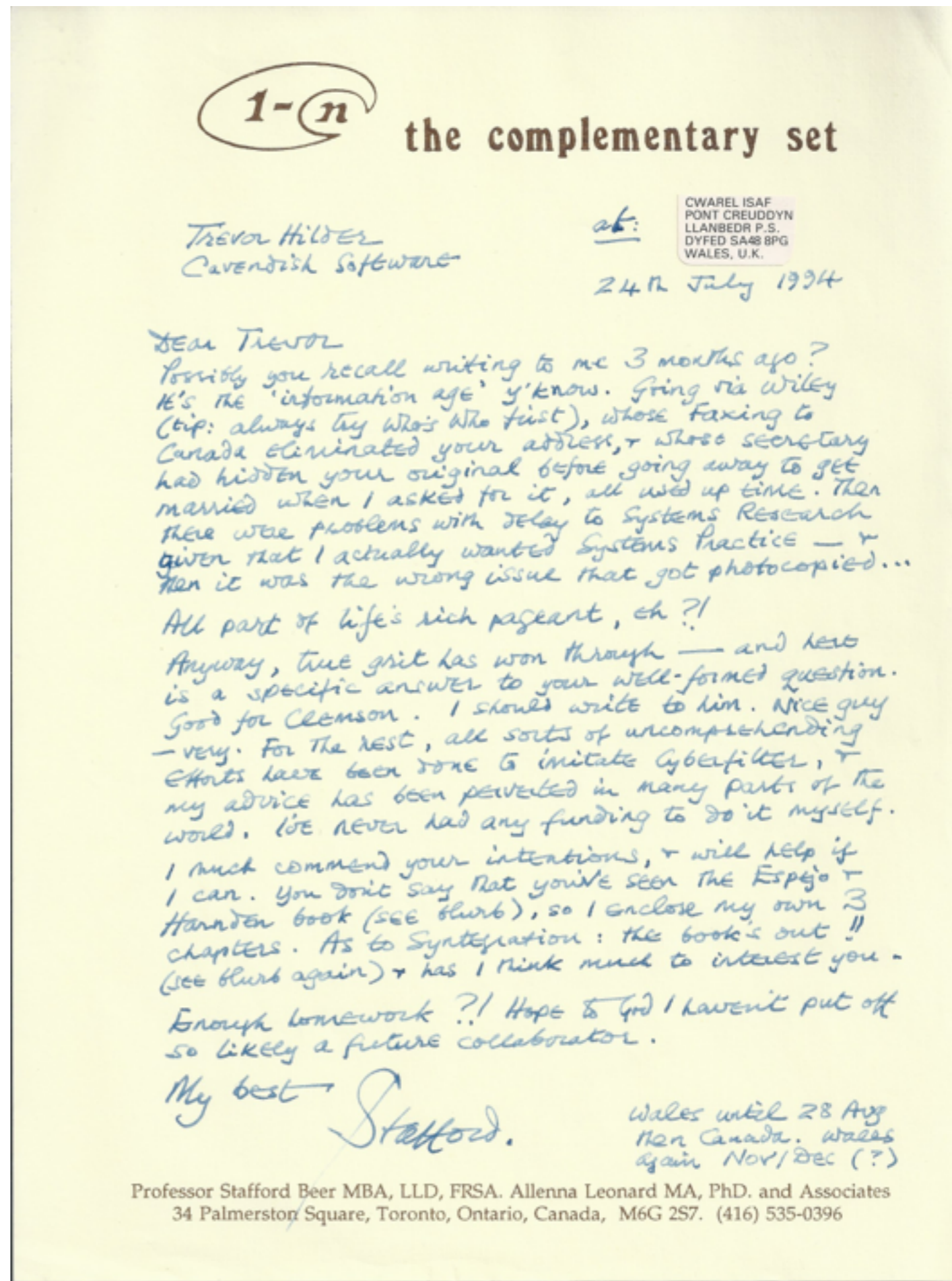
- It was 1993. I already had nearly twenty years' experience in ICT.
- Many ICT projects failed. I knew that this was due to social, not to technical issues, but nobody seemed interested in this.
- I wanted to know how to guarantee project success.
- I saw a world of “virtual organisations” coming, and thought maybe we could build tools to design and implement them.
- I thought this might be the “killer app” for Microsoft Windows 95 and beyond, and I wanted to develop it.

Why was I interested in Stafford's Work? - 2

- I had bought a copy of *Platform for Change* in the 1970s, read it, then put it in a bookshelf and forgot about it.
- In 1993, I re-read it, then read *Brain, Heart and Diagnosing the System*.
- I was surprised to find that Stafford was still alive.
- In April 1994, I wrote a letter to Stafford c/o Wiley & Sons, his publisher, explaining my ambitions.
- I heard nothing back and chased this up in June & July 1994.

In July 1994, I Received a Letter from Stafford

- Stafford gave me a reading list.
- I read everything and replied by letter in August 1994 with a detailed plan for action.
- *Beyond Dispute* came out, I read it and replied by letter on 11th August.
- Next day, Stafford phoned asking me to meet him in Wales.



What Made Stafford Suddenly Decide to Meet Me?

- I had written to him about the “earlier technospheric infoset” in Baghdad 750-1000 CE which kick-started the modern world. He had failed to mention this in his book.
- I had referred to the origins of the *Enneagram* and enclosed some observations on that from a book which had just been published.
- He obviously found these matters more interesting than my previous letters about the possibilities opened up by personal computing and the VSM!

I Meet Stafford

- On 15th August 1994, I drove to Aberaeron to meet Stafford in the *Black Lion* Pub for lunch.

- My notes say:

12:00 Met Stafford and had a very long discussion with him.

We went back to his "house" and met Robin Asby and continued the discussion. I lent Robin Barry Clemson's article about the VSM Toolbox. He will copy it and send me back a copy, with details of how to contact other people involved with the VSM.

"I asked you for riches, but you gave me foraging rights on a distant shore."

- I should have paid more attention to this parting poetry!

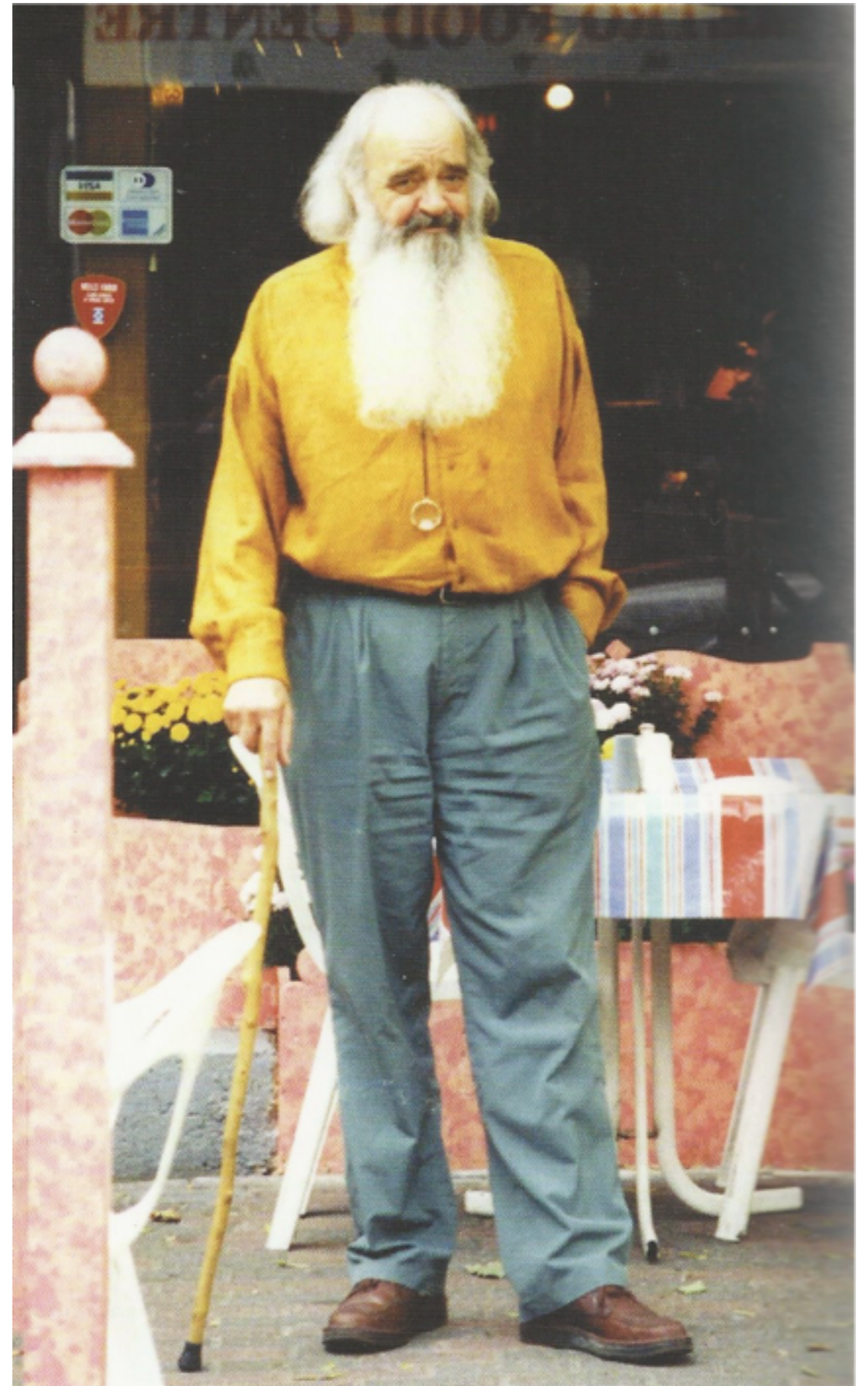


Cwarel Isaf

Stafford's "House"

Who Was This Bloke?

- Anthony Stafford Beer was born on 25th September 1926 in Fulham, London.
- Father was Chief Statistician for Lloyd's Register of Shipping
- Mother worked at a bank until she got married and was artistically talented.
- Brother Ian David Stafford was born in 1931. Became President of the Rugby Football Union and headmaster of several public schools including Harrow.

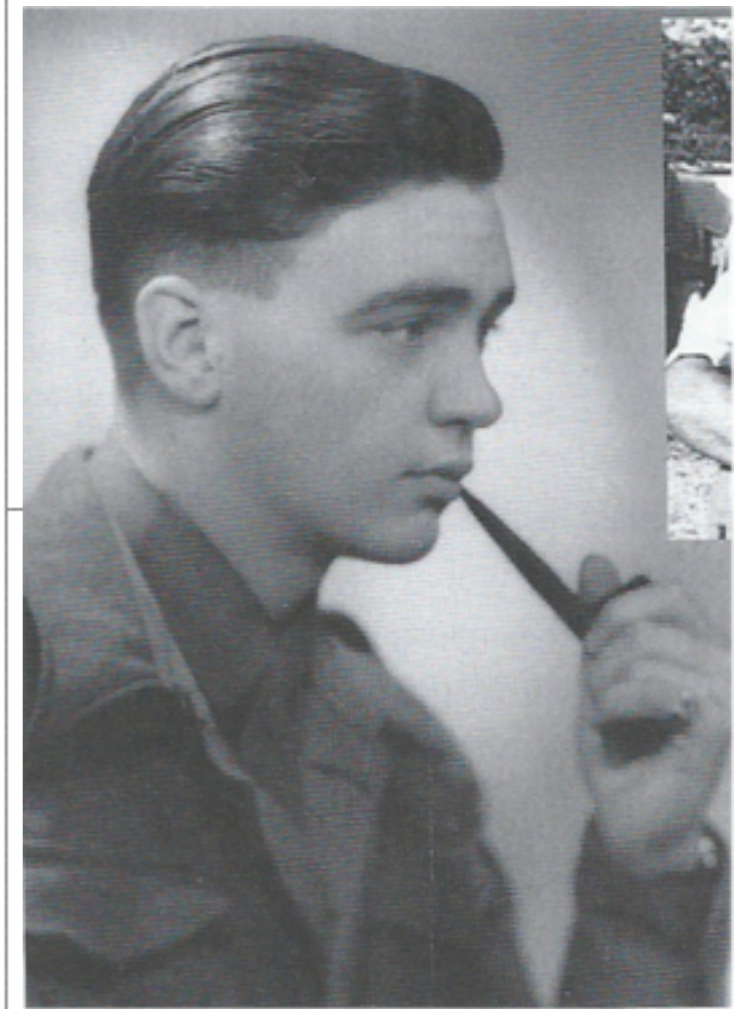
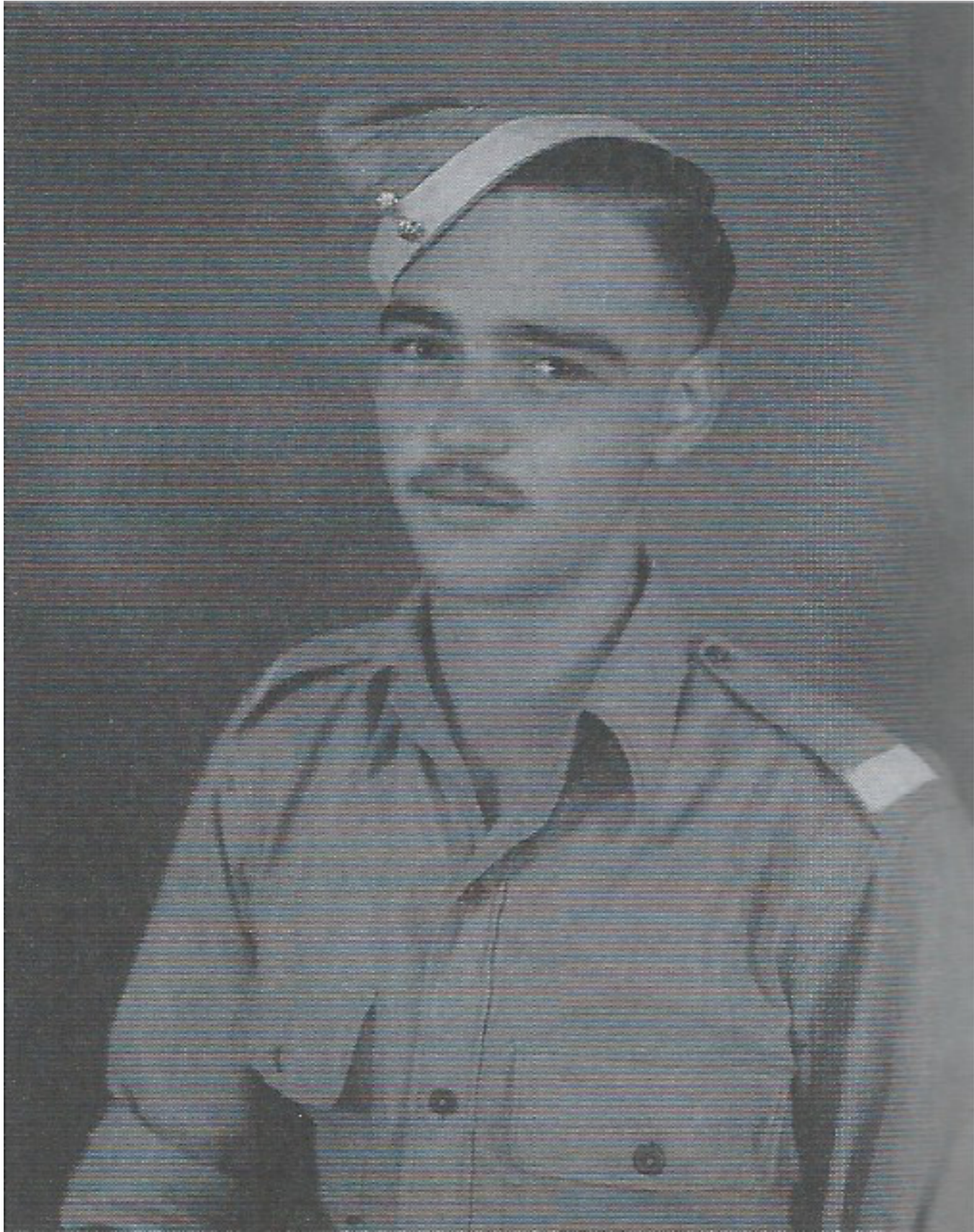


Grew Up in Shirley, near Croydon

- Educated at the Whitgift School, founded in 1596.
- During the Blitz, evacuated to Abergele in North Wales.
- Returns to Whitgift School in 1942, but teaches himself advanced mathematics in Croydon public library in the summer.
- In 1943 gains entrance to University College London, but it gets bombed and re-locates to Aberystwyth, Wales.
- Stafford goes there and studies whatever he wants, loving every minute.

Roman Catholicism

- Stafford shocks his Anglican father by converting to Roman Catholicism.
- After one year in Aberystwyth, Stafford enlists in the army on his eighteenth birthday, thus ending his formal education.
- This enables him to choose where to serve: India.
- Why?



- Stafford in India

Bangalore & The Punjab

- Hangs out with the local Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims in preference to being in the British officers' mess.
- Learns the local languages, yoga & meditation.
- Sees Gandhi speak twice.
- Becomes a tertiary of the Franciscan Order.
- Preparing to invade Japan when the war ends.
- Works as an intelligence officer until Indian independence in 1947.

Returns to England in 1947

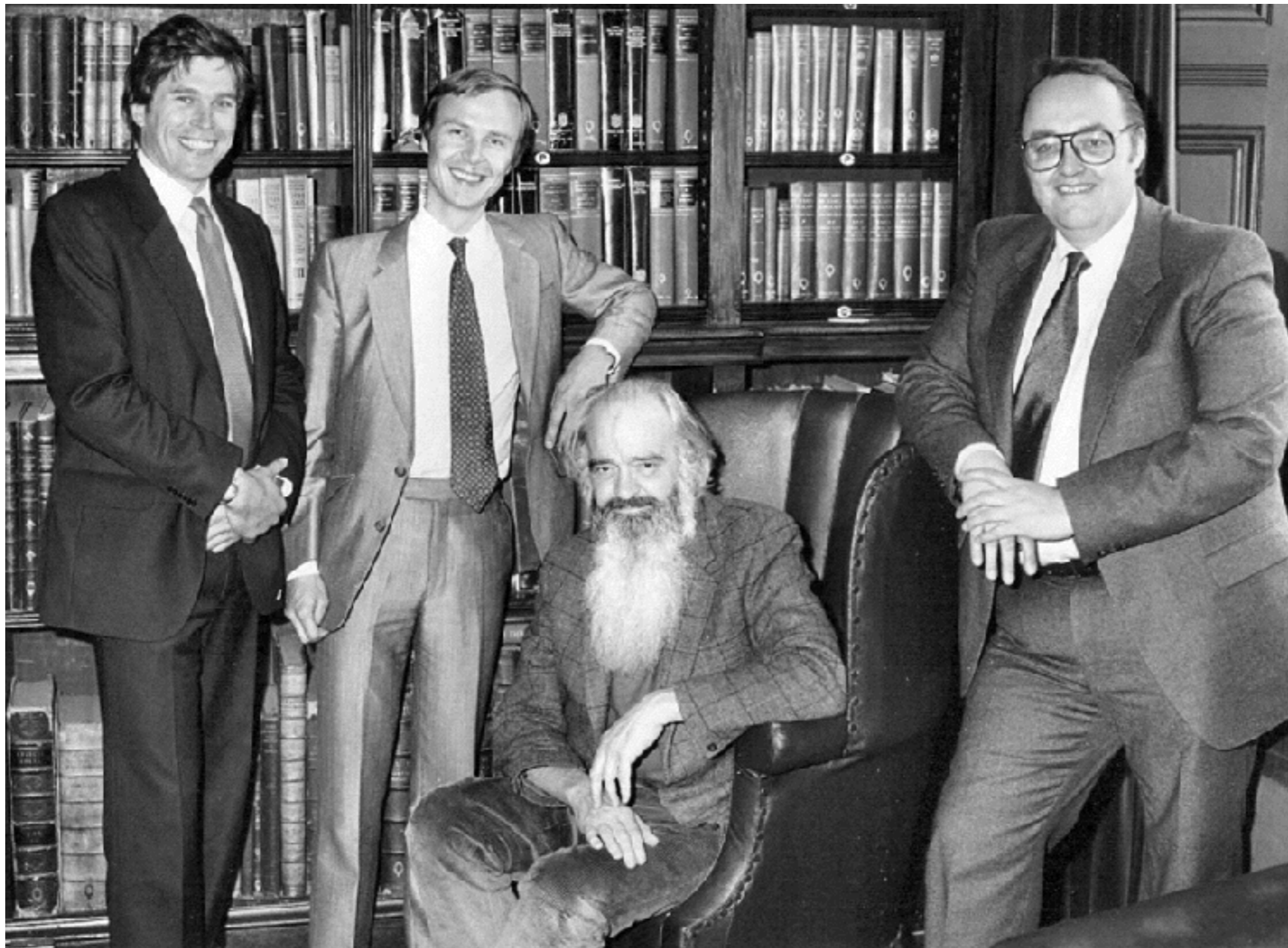
- Discovers Operational Research, which was then only known in military circles.
- Becomes Army Psychologist and commands a special unit for illiterate soldiers.
- Gets attached to the Human Factors Branch of the Operational Research Unit at the War Office.
- Marries Cynthia - will have five kids with her.

Demobbed in September 1948, Becomes a Celebrity by 1960

- Joins the steel industry, trains in management for one year, then sets up one of the first civilian OR groups in the world.
- Learns of cybernetics, contacts Ross Ashby in Bristol and attends the First International Congress on Cybernetics in Namur, Belgium. He pioneers the use of computers in industry.
- Publishes first book *Cybernetics and Management* in 1959.
- In 1960, tours the USA and meets all the founding fathers of cybernetics, systems and information theory. Presents his paper *Towards the Cybernetic Factory*.
- Is offered several jobs in “Lotus Land”, but chooses to return to England.

In 1961 Establishes SIGMA Ltd - Still a Celebrity

- The first OR and cybernetics consultancy in the UK.
- Publishes *Decision and Control* in 1966.
- Becomes Development Director of IPC, the world's largest publisher.
- In 1968, marriage to Cynthia dissolved, marries Sallie Steadman and leaves the Roman Catholic Church.
- Hangs out in the Athenaeum Club with J G Bennett and learns about Gurdjieff, Ouspensky and the *Enneagram*.



Stafford in the Athenaeum Club 1984

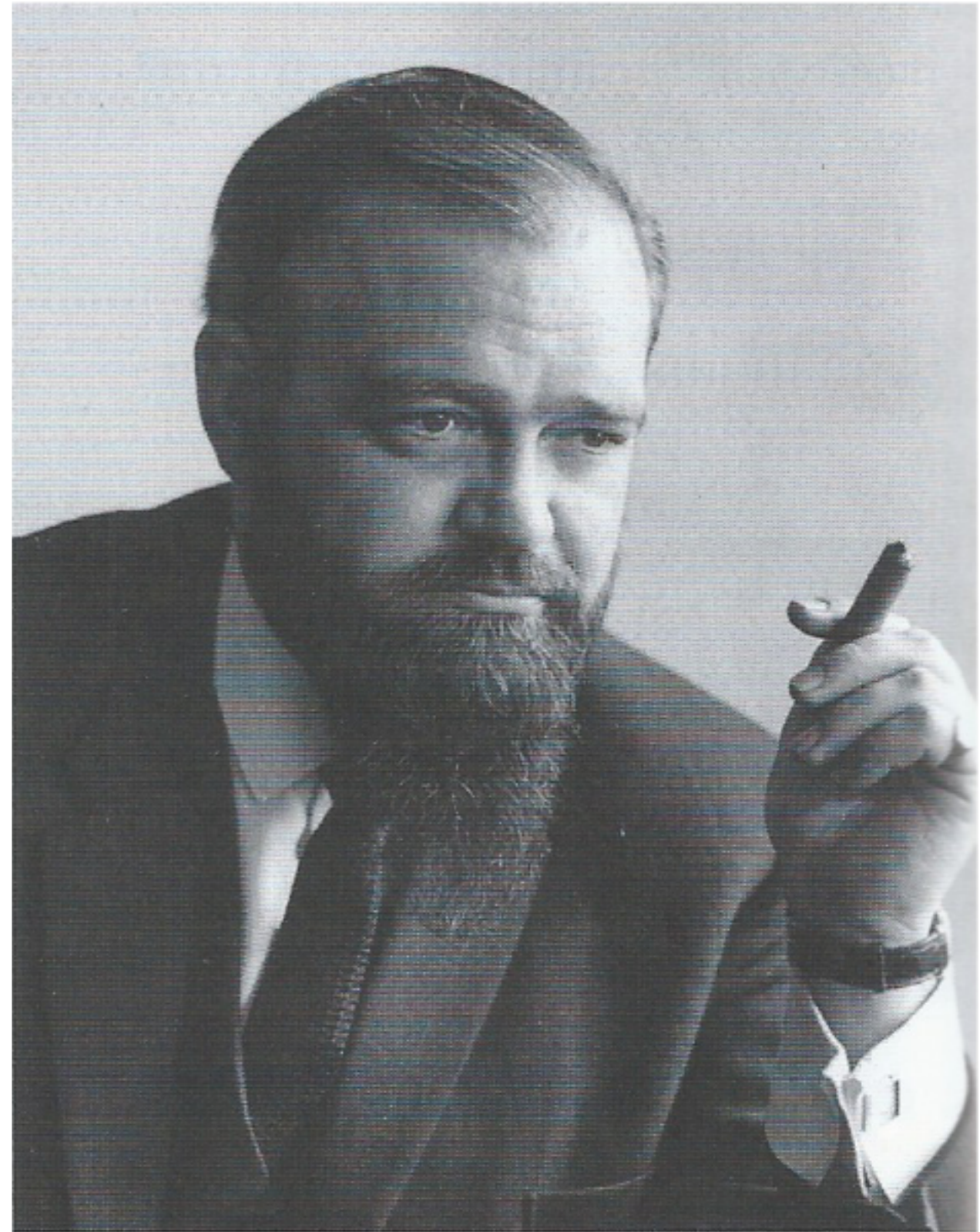
Project Cybersyn in Chile

- In 1971, Fernando Flores asks Stafford to help manage the Chilean economy under socialist president Salvador Allende.
- On 11th September 1973, Pinochet stages CIA-backed coup against President Allende, who kills himself.



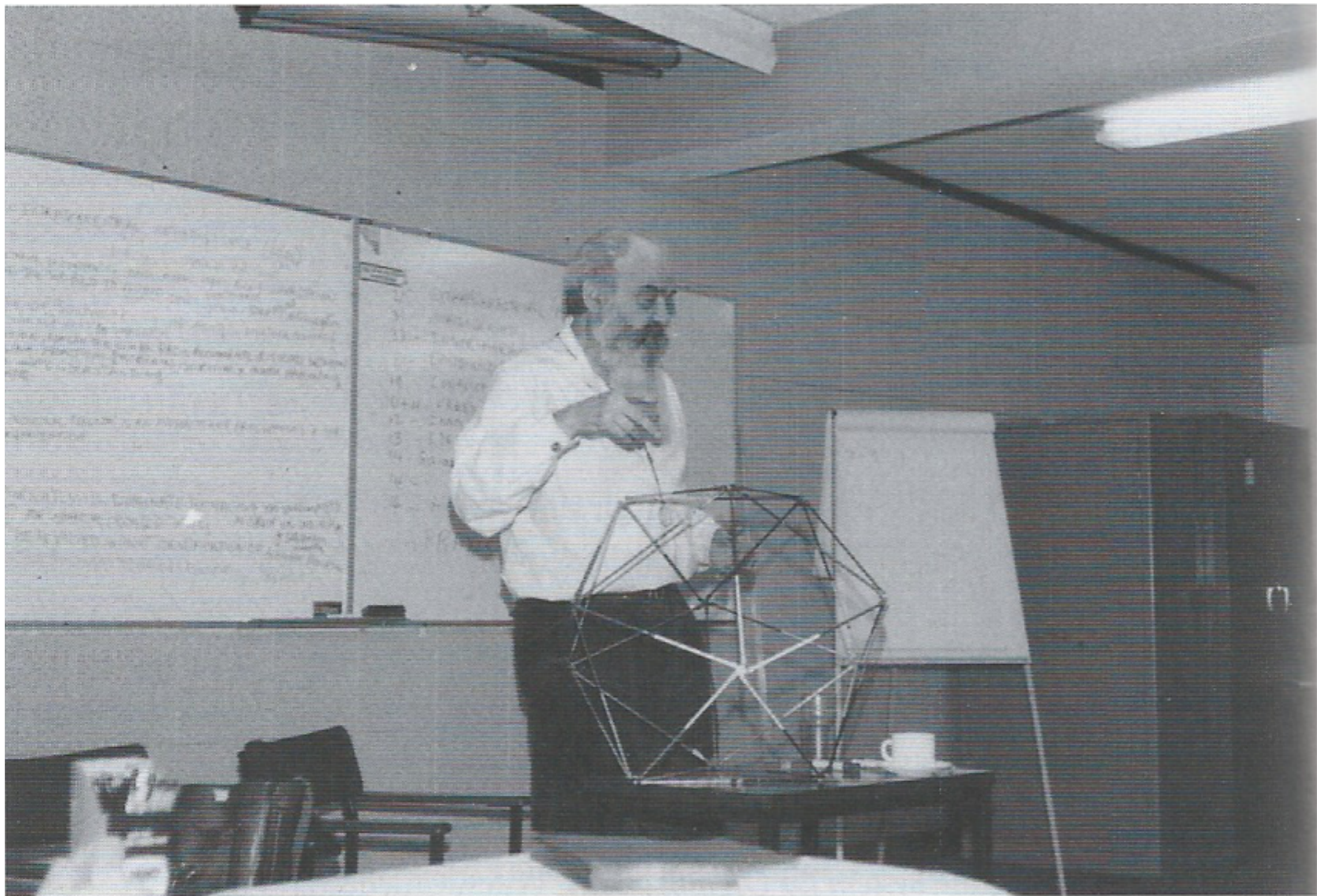
Stafford Beer - Socialist?

- Gave talks to socialist groups in England during Project Cybersyn, but arrived in his Rolls-Royce car.
- After the coup, helped rescue many Chileans and establish their careers in the UK.
- Raúl Espejo - the most prominent.



Wizard Prang Emerges

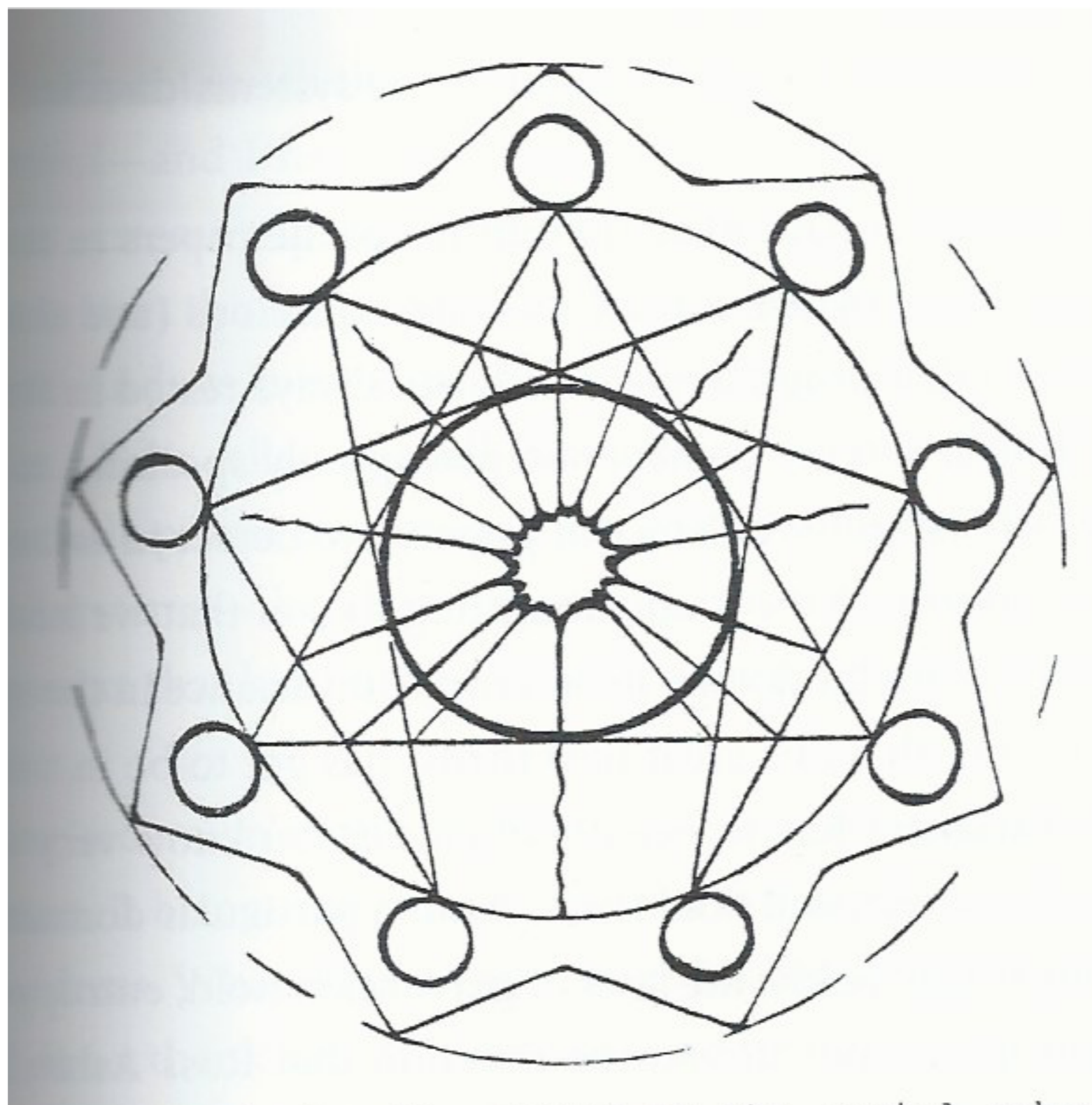
- In 1975, finds Cwarel Isaf and becomes a hermit there.
- In 1981, meets Allenna Leonard in Toronto, and divides his time between Wales & Toronto thereafter.
- In 1982, Javier Livas meets Stafford in Toronto and Stafford spends most of 1983 in Mexico.
- In 1989, writes *Chronicles of Wizard Prang*, but Wiley refuse to publish it. Stafford is still angry about this years later.
- In 1990, launches Team Syntegrity at Manchester Business School. This is partly based on mystical ideas related to the *Enneagram*.



At Manchester Business
School in 1990, Unveiling his
Syntegrity Model

Stafford and the Enneagram

- He first heard about it from J G Bennett in conversations at the Athenaeum Club in the 1960s.
- Bennett knew about it from Gurdjieff and Ouspensky.
- Stafford was given a mandala by a Buddhist monk in Santiago, Chile, during his work 1971-1973, with an enneagram in it. The monk was a missionary for Arica founded by Oscar Ichazo.
- See pages 202-207 of *Beyond Dispute*.



Sunburst Model of the Self

From a presentation in November 1982

I Join the Stafford Beer Cells and Work on VSM Modelling

- After my visit to Cwavel Isaf, Robin Asby puts me in touch with the Stafford Beer Cell at City University and I join the community.
- I find out all I can about software tools to support VSM modelling and make contact with Barry Clemson, Raúl Espejo and many other people who have such tools.
- In October 1994 I write an introductory presentation to the VSM and get Stafford to critique it.
- In November 1994, I present on the VSM to a group of people interested in Virtual Organisations. At the same meeting, David Pendlebury demonstrates, Mosaic, the first web browser for Microsoft Windows.
- There seems to be a demand for a VSM Modelling package for Windows, so I start writing one.

I Make Contact with Bill Livingston

- On 13th December 1994, I go to Liverpool and Joe Truss gives me a copy of Bill's Autumn 1994 edition of his *Short Circuit* quarterly journal.
- I contact Bill and his associates and read his books.
- These explain why it is hard to change organisations and what to do about it.
- This looks to me like the missing element in applying the VSM to improving organisations.
- Bill met Stafford in late 1994 in Toronto, but I discovered later that Stafford thought Bill was boring, and Bill thought Stafford was a vain guru figure, so there was no meeting of minds between them!

Chronicles of Wizard Prang

- Probably the most revealing work written by Stafford!
- Used to circulate in photocopied form amongst Stafford's associates. Can now be found at <http://itsy.co.uk/wizardprang/index.htm>.
- I first read it in the autumn of 1995, and found it deeply embarrassing.
- Was Stafford a Tantric Guru, a Welsh Wizard, Professor Branestawm, a Dirty Old Man or what? Could he really levitate into the air?
- Perhaps he didn't know who he really was???



Stafford Fails The Sonia Test

- I picked up Stafford from Cwavel Isaf on 20th February 1995 and brought him to my house to review my progress on the VSM Modeller.
- My wife Sonia is a psychotherapist who can “read” people at a glance as they arrive at the door.
- When she saw Stafford, she was appalled and described him privately to me as “a vain old man”.
- Is this compatible with his claim to have been studying Eastern spirituality, to “dissolve the ego”?

I Release the VSM Modeller for Windows 95

- In July 1995, I release the alpha version of VSM Modeller for Windows on two diskettes.
- In the next two months, I distribute nearly 30 copies to the USA and the UK. Early reviews are very positive, so I start work on an improved version.
- I get head-hunted by Jerry Meek to teach ICT at his new business school in Winchester.
- Feedback on VSM Modeller dies out.

I Apply What I Have Learned On a Big ICT Project

- Starting in January 1996, I apply everything I have learned to reforming the ICT for a chain of 2,500 convenience stores, with annual turnover of £2 billion.
- The three-year project is a brilliant success!
- But the method is impossible to sell, because nobody believes it is possible.
- I've been refining these methods and applying them ever since, across a range of fields.
- But almost nobody is interested in learning how this works.

Did Stafford Ever Get Anything to Really Work?

- How many of Stafford's "cybernetic interventions" were really successful?
- Did Project Cybersyn in Chile achieve anything?
- It is one thing to diagnose organisational dysfunction, but another thing to solve it.
- Is Team Syntegrity just a contrived "Westphalian" protocol to evade the real issues of decision-making?



Stafford presenting at Manchester Business School about Cybersyn in 1974

Was Stafford a Man Trapped Between Worlds? -1

- He grew up in the comfortable world of the British Establishment, just as the British Empire collapsed.
- He was drawn to the monkishness of St Francis of Assisi.
- He experienced India at a formative age, but did he understand it?
- He was a celebrity of science & technology on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.
- He abandoned Roman Catholicism because he felt it was anti-scientific, but he railed against the reductionism of science.
- He encountered Latin American “magical realist” socialism, but it all ended in tears.

Was Stafford a Man Trapped Between Worlds? - 2

- He got caught in the middle of the Cold War between the USA and the USSR.
- He was a scientist, a mystic, a poet and a painter.
- He made grandiose gestures, but there wasn't always anybody paying attention.
- He became a disappointed man, frustrated at the lack of recognition of his achievements.
- He accepted that good managers use the VSM intuitively, but couldn't get bad managers to learn to use it.



Stafford died on 23rd
August 2002 in Toronto

A Prophet Without Honour in His Own Country?

- Stafford is probably least recognised in the UK and USA.
- He is probably remembered with most respect in Latin America, German-speaking Europe and Canada.
- *A Celebration of Stafford Beer's Life and Work* took place at the London School of Economics on 3rd March 2003.
- I presented on *Viability versus Tribalism*. The other presenters were much more distinguished and from all over the world.

Stafford was a Man Ahead of his Time

- He was struggling to transcend the cultural boundaries between East & West as early as 1943.
- We now live in a world where we need to succeed in this venture if we are to survive.
- It is unrealistic to expect the pioneer to have succeeded in such an ambitious venture.
- Can we do better?

What Is Stafford's Legacy?

- A community still struggling to get to grips with the many dimensions of the man?
- Do we want to get recognition for his ideas or apply them?
- Are these incompatible objectives?
- If so, why?

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