

# Case Study

## Wallace Beakhouse

**Wallace, from Tilehurst, was in his 70s when he was diagnosed as autistic. He had long believed he was different from other people but did not know why.**

He served in the RAF as a driver in Egypt and Burma in the late 1940s and then worked for the Thames Conservancy.

He had coped with life for many years, thanks to his wife Kathleen, but after she died suddenly in March 1993, life found a way of leading him to his autism diagnosis.

Visiting All Saints' Church in North Moreton, near Wallingford, which he had visited with Kathleen the previous year, he picked up a leaflet about volunteering as a welcomer at Christ Church Cathedral in Oxford. He soon settled into the role, becoming an expert on the cathedral's history.

A colleague invited him to her 40th wedding anniversary party and introduced him to one of her friends, who worked as a nursery teacher and had a boy with autism in her class. They fell into conversation about Wallace's schooldays.

He still vividly remembers the morning in 1932 when, aged five years and four months old, his mother woke him and dressed him in a grey uniform, then walked him along Oxford Road, near Grovelands.

Wallace asked where were they going? "To school" his mother said. "What's school?" asked Wallace. "You'll find out," his mother replied.

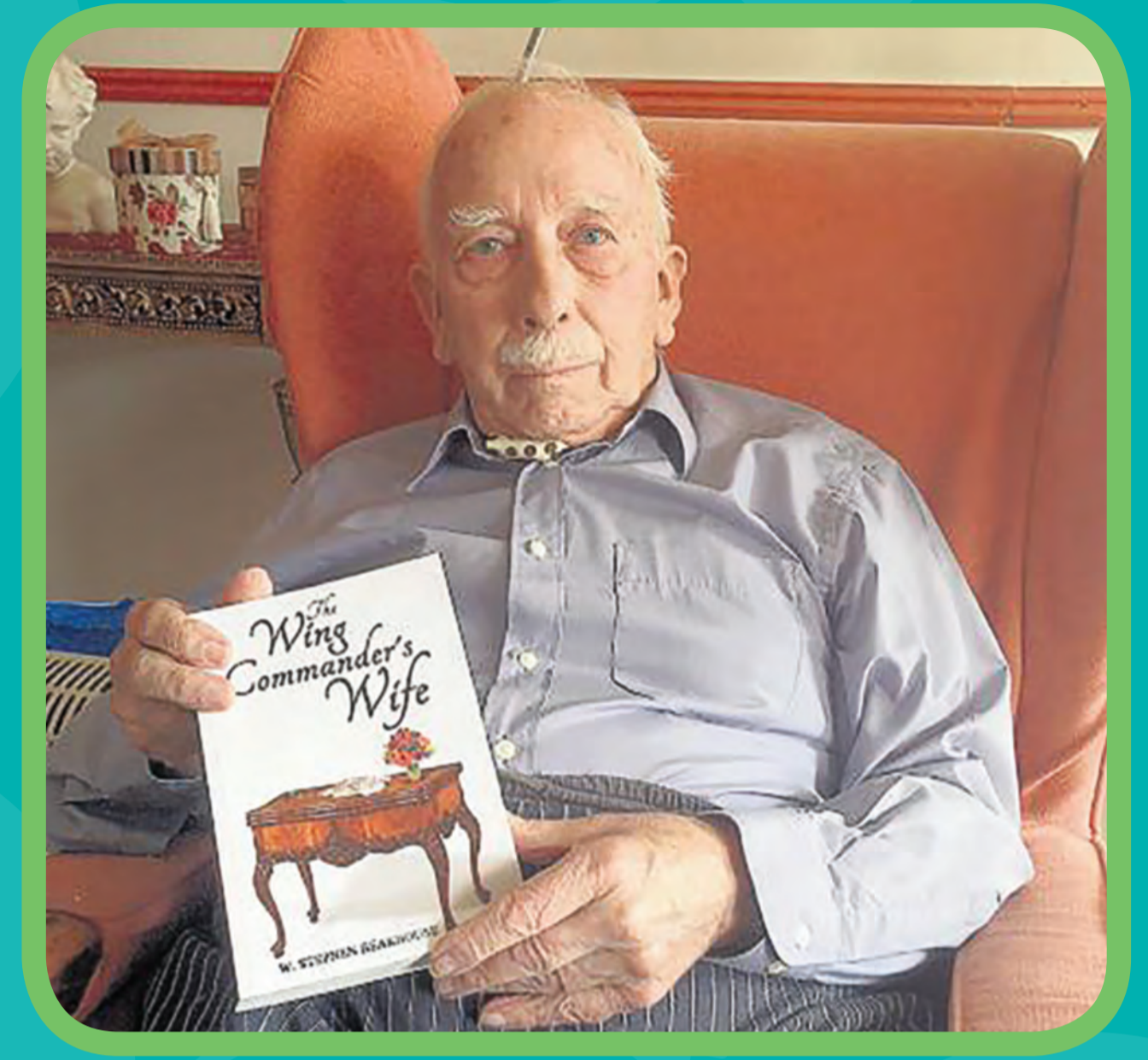
He remembers being in a large hall and that somehow all the other children seemed to know where to go. He watched them walk to their new classrooms until he was alone in the room. Feeling so overwhelmed at being so vulnerable for the first time in his life, he began to cry.

Another mother saw him crying, so went to get the headmaster, Mr Kirby, who put him in Mrs Stevens' classroom. He was cuffed round the ear twice for crying before break time at 10.45am.

At break time Wallace again found himself unsure where to go. He was red from crying all morning and damp with tears but another teacher, Miss Stella Martin, comforted him.

After school had finished for the day, his mother was told to take him away and not to bring him back. They thought they had a candidate for the Whitley Special School (now known as The Avenue).

When much older, Wallace learned of a meeting between Mr Kirby, Miss Martin and his parents, at which Miss Martin had persuaded Mr Kirby to keep Wallace at the school.



Wallace with a copy of his novel *The Wing Commander's Wife*, which was published in 2013.

She took him into her class and gave him a single wooden desk at the back of the classroom. She told him not to worry that the other pupils would be a year ahead of him and that he was to concentrate on his own work.

Wallace stayed in her class for two years before moving on and benefited from Miss Martin spending lots of time working with him, helping him to bloom. She also taught him how to say his name properly: "Not Haw Haw Baptist! Your name is Wallace Beakhouse."

Hearing his account, the nursery teacher told him: "Do you know what, Wallace, I'm almost sure you're autistic. Can't catch it, you're born with it."

Through a private referral from his GP, Wallace was finally diagnosed as autistic by Professor Patricia Howlin at St George's Hospital in London in 1998.