

List of participants (with abbreviations)

Interviewer: Rob (**I**) & Gary (**I2**); Interviewee: Gordon Barton (**GB**)

Time **Description**

00:00:00 **GB:** My name is Gordon Barton and I joined Donald Healey Motor
00:00:15 Company in 1954. I started in the Service Shop and then went into the
Stores about six months later and that was about, as I say, I just stayed
in the Stores and that was it really, basically.
00:00:30 **I:** So, when did you first encounter a Healey car?
GB: well, as I say, I saw the Silverstone before I started work . I lived
00:00:45 down Leam Terrace in Leamington and there was this red Healey. I had
never heard of it before, they were showing it to two brothers who ran a
00:01:00 chrome-plating business in Leamington and I remember looking at it and
thinking crikey and it was red and it was a new one as well, but that was
about the first time I had ever heard of a Healey.
I: And how long was that before you ended up working for them?
00:01:15 **GB:** [Indistinct] I should think about two years probably.
00:01:30 **I:** So, then, obviously, you ended up working at the Cape. How did that
come about?
GB: As I say, it nearly didn't happen because I applied for a job at Mains
00:01:45 the Vauxhall dealers in Leamington and luckily, really, the job had been
taken so, I went back to the job centre and they said 'oh, Donald Healey
the Motor Company in the Cape in Warwick want, they're looking for
someone up there', so, I had never heard of them, you know, anyway,
00:02:00 they explained to me where it was and I got the bike, I was on the bike,
and I rode up to Warwick and as I was approaching Lock Lane there was
a Healey came down the other way and it went there and I thought that
00:02:15 must be it, so I followed it down, and when I biked into the works, there
was about twelve American servicemen there, all in uniforms, wandering
about, and all these lovely Healeys about and I thought 'this is the place
00:02:30 for me'. I went there and the Foreman at that time was an ex-RAF chap,
Bob Rivett his name is, and I said 'Bob Rivet' and he said 'Bob Rivett old
00:02:45 boy, Bob Rivett'. He'd got a handlebar moustache, and I think it was on

Friday and they said 'when do you want to start?' and I started on the Monday.

I: What was the first thing they had you doing?

00:03:00 **GB:** Well I worked with a chap called Tom Wincott who was the mechanic and he had got an Alvis engine on the bench, a 3 litre Alvis out of an Alvis Healey, because of course the benches were substantial, they
00:03:15 were oak and metal top, and he was just finishing it off, building it up. Most of the time you were doing all the work that they didn't want to do, underneath and draining oil, and all that sort of thing, I used to hate the
00:03:30 smell of the hot oil, it used to make me feel a bit sick, actually. That was when they were doing the Le Mans kits like, converting the cars. They
00:03:45 used to arrive on a ... from Longbridge, with sort of second-hand seats in and they used to come to Healey's and then they used to convert the
00:04:00 engine to Le Mans spec, fit the louvred bonnet, and then they used to test them and then they would go back on the transporter to be finished
00:04:15 off. They were left-hand drive most of them. I had a stop watch with me as well and I used to go on tests with them up the road, got white overalls on. They said, 'Go up the road and test it'. We went down by the Castle
00:04:30 on the Banbury Road, and then we used to pull up , and they used to say "Retard it, advance it, on the distributor and then we used to go off again, nought to sixty, I mean, these were new cars, by the way, so they
00:04:45 wouldn't, you know,... but they still used to do about just under ten seconds I think it was. But these days, if you pulled up on the Banbury Road you'd never get out again, would you? [Laughter]. You'd never get back out. But anyway, and then we used to go down the Barford Straight
00:05:00 what we called the Barford Straight, it was a test route we used to go down and it had a long straight with a slight kink halfway down, but when you are doing about ninety miles an hour, it becomes a bend and they
00:05:15 used to go through into the village, turn round and come back down. A few complaints, I think, at the time, but that was the test route.

I: Were they still manufacturing any models there or had that stopped by then?

00:05:30 **GB:** No. That's right, the Experimental Department of course were doing

prototypes but the only, that was the 100 S of course, when they produced those in 1955, they had them lined up about half of the
00:05:45 workshop, the service shop was with 100 S's being built, that was '55.

I: How many did they do at a time?

GB: I can't remember now. They did fifty all together, about fifty, plus the
00:06:00 race cars, which was probably about fifty-four, fifty-five of them. And as I
say, the Experimental were doing the race cars for Le Mans, and places
00:06:15 like that, Targa Floria and all that sort of thing Mille Miglia. Yes, quite
interesting time that was, really. As I say, we used to get there early in
00:06:30 the morning, we used to have to put the cars into the workshop, get as
many in as we could, in the service bay each side, and then you could
get 100s in the centre, side by side, and you used to have to get as many
in as you could and then I used to get there early in the morning to get
00:06:45 them out again. I couldn't drive, I'd got no licence. John Gardner, he
says, 'can you drive?' I said 'No.' They had got a Series E Morris van
00:07:00 and he was running along the side of the van with the door open telling
me what to do with the pedals. And then only about a week after that, I
was in the Healeys, brand new cars.

I: Quite a responsibility.

00:07:15 **GB:** Yes, luckily I didn't damage one of them, I can't remember so,
00:07:15 anyway.

I: So then you worked for Fred Draper?

GB: I went into the Stores, at the Cape, and then I was seeing to the
00:07:30 workshop, supplying the work shop with all the service bits and pieces,
00:07:45 bolts and things, so I stayed in there. One day a black 100 came up and
pulled up in front of the service hatch and James Robertson Justice got
out of it. I couldn't believe it. How he got in it, never mind out of. He was
00:08:00 just in for a service, I think.

I: Did you get many well-known faces turning up like that?

GB: I think there was something to do with Colman's Mustard, he'd got a,
00:08:15 I think it was a Tickford, and it was in the mustard colour and I think it
was one of the Coleman directors, or Coleman himself, I think.

I: And had the colour specially sprayed because it was the mustard

00:08:30 colour?

GB: Yes it was. We had a few celebrities. But Brian Healey used to tag
00:08:45 onto them, you know Brian, Bic.

I: How about the race drivers? Did some of the drivers..?

00:09:00 **GB:** Yes, Clive Baker wasn't there then, no that was later, wasn't it?

00:09:00 **I:** Stirling Moss?

GB: I didn't see Stirling Moss. He got associated with the boats, when
they started making the boats, he was more involved with that sort of
00:09:15 thing, I think. They were doing the boats later on.

I: They used to float them, didn't they? They had an area where they
used to float them?

00:09:30 **GB:** Yes. I think the first one sank actually. I think they left it there over
their dinner hour and when they came back it was submerged. But I
think they put it right. They were nice boats, they were actually, some of
00:09:45 them. Very collectable I think now.

I: So can you describe the layout of the Cape Works and what the
different departments were?

GB: Yes, it was like an old aircraft hangar and down one side were the
00:10:00 offices and the other side was like, in the top corner was the Machine
Shop and then the Stores was beyond that along the side and there were
00:10:15 some offices at the front of the building as well, Geoff Price, Director, and
Donald Healey's office, they were at the front of the building obviously.
You'd got the telephone exchange office there as well. And then at the
00:10:30 back, at the rear part of it was the Experimental, they had got some
corrugated sheet along, at the back end of the building, but they had also
00:10:45 got one at the front, as you come in through the gate, the entrance, there
was one on the right-hand side, a smaller building there and they were
00:11:00 doing certain work in there, sort of prototype work, in a smaller place.
And then the new building, the newer building at the side, had just been
00:11:15 completed, when I worked there. It's said they built it for the boat
production really, but I think they did do some boat production there, but,
I think after that they used it as a servicing bay. I went in there once and
00:11:30 there was a Ferrari in there, a 1954 single-seater Ferrari backed in there

and they had the engine out and put it into a Healey chassis. It didn't work, it didn't come to anything, but I remember them starting it up, the corrugated sheets rattling away [Laughs].

00:11:45
I: We have heard from a lot of people that they were very secretive in the Experimental Works. Can you describe that?

00:12:00
GB: Yes, they were. I mean, me being in the Stores, I may have to go over there once or twice. Geoff didn't say anything to me, he didn't say, "You are not supposed to be ..., get out!" but they were doing all sorts of things in there.

I: Did you have to sign anything?

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00:12:45
GB: No. They did one like a bird cage frame, it ended up like a hill climb car, like a Lotus 7 on a larger scale, that was the sort of thing they did all a tubular frame and that. Yes, they used to get some quite comical things happen there as well. We used to play up...

I: I bet there was some real characters work there.

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GB: Yes, they were. One day I was at the Stores and a chap comes up and says 'can I have the thrust washer off a gearbox?' I said "What sort of box is it?" "A BN1 3-speed." I said, what do you want that for then? He said 'you can have it back again'. Anyway, he goes off and Jack Atkins, a big chap he was, he had just completed this gearbox and it was on the bench and he had gone to the toilet I think, and Alf Smith, the one who had it, he wiped in a little bit of oil and just left it on his bench by the side of the gearbox. Meantime, he gets sent out on a breakdown, so I was watching Jack and he picked it up and was looking, and of course he didn't know and said "Did I put one in? I'm sure I did!". He came up to me and said "Did I have one of those washers out? Can you check up and see." and I said "No, Jack we didn't have one of them out?" 'Oh, damn' he says. [Laughs]. And then he started taking the side off, and I had to stop him. And I said "It's just a joke!" He said "It's that Alf Smith, I'll bet. I'll break his neck!" and if I hadn't been watching, Jack would have taken that box apart, to check. One of the best, most comical things was John Gardner, as I said, you'll have to try and get to interview him, it was when the 100-6 came out and it was parked in front of the

00:14:30 Stores gateway and what they used to do, if you lift the bonnet up and just put it on the prop, it doesn't go back very far, and I don't know what John was doing but it was something by the bulkhead and he was having

00:14:45 a hell of a game, he was swearing. What they used to do was tie a string round the plunge on the bonnet, take it across the back of the hood and put it on the boot lid handle, and by not using the prop rod it would come back quite considerably more, give you more space to work in.

00:15:00 Meantime, Geoff Price comes with a customer and he had left something in the boot, so, Geoff opens the boot up, of course the bonnet goes down on Jake's neck. He couldn't get out. I've never seen anything so funny

00:15:15 in all my life. Well, John didn't think it was of course! He thought it was one of the mechanics playing up and he dashed off to his bench, grabbed a hammer and ran round the back of the car and Geoff was like 'steady

00:15:30 on', and the customer sort of looked, you know, cos he thought somebody was playing up. It was quite funny, really.

I: So when did you acquire your Healey?

00:15:45 **GB:** Not until 1999 actually. Who would have thought then in those days, so collectible, because people were just using them as everyday

00:16:00 transport, weren't they?. I didn't ever think I would get one to be honest, but this one cropped up, and, so, yes, April 1999 it was.

I: Could you say a bit about how you acquired it?

00:16:15 **GB:** It was a chap called Dave Barker who restores Healeys – he is not very well-known because he restores Jaguars as well on a small scale. He was up near Grantham in Lincolnshire, a nice chap. He used to come

00:16:30 down to us and he used to bring us patterns and things like that, to work to which was very handy. I was trying to get hold of a BN 7 Mark 2, two-

00:16:45 seater, with a triple carb because they only made about three hundred and fifty-five and had the chance of one and the chap didn't want to sell it in the end, he decided he didn't want to sell it in the end. That's what I

00:17:00 wanted to get, that's what I was looking for but they were very difficult. So, in the meantime, Keith Bates who was on the phone said 'Dave Barker's got two 100s he's rebuilding'. So, anyway, he'd finished one off

00:17:15 and he rebuilt it as a left-hand drive car first and then couldn't sell it for

some reason, and then he was converting it to right-hand drive. I spoke to him – he had all the parts from us, AH Spares, and then he said ‘come and have a look at it’, so I went over. When I went over I took a louvred bonnet, a strap, alloy rocker cover, wood-rimmed wheel, I took all that with me just in case I decided to get it because it wasn’t Le Mans converted at that time. So, anyway, I decided to have it and I tried to bring him down on the price but he said ‘I’ll tell you what I’ll do, I’ll fit the bonnet, we’ve still got some of the paint left that we sprayed and I’ll fit the rocker cover and the wheel, I’ll put that in with it’. So, I thought OK then.

I: What colour is it?

00:18:15 **GB:** It was ice-blue metallic. So, yes, we had that done. Because it fooled a lot of people, really, because it wasn’t Le Mans modified at that time. It is now, but it wasn’t then.

00:18:30 I: What does it feel like, to drive a Healey? What’s distinctive about it, do you think?

GB: Well, you have got to concentrate a bit more, and they are drum brakes, but they are quite good, if you, the BN 2 was a better car, the brakes were improved, they had got wider brakes on the BN 2. Saying that’s a high point axle but the later BN 1s had a high point axle but they retained the narrow brakes at the front, so what they did, they put smaller bore cylinders at the front, to compensate, a bit more pressure. But when the BN 2 came out it had the wider shoes on the same size as the back. It never had servos or anything like that. But it’s amazing. You know, yesterday when I took it out, I had to stop quite quick and it’s surprising how quick it did stop. You’ve got to press on it really [laughs] For drum brakes they’re really good.

00:19:30 I: What sorts of speeds would it get up to now, do you think?

GB: I’m not sure. The Le Mans kit took me from ninety brake horse power to a hundred and ten, I’ve had all the different pistons, high pressure pistons, cam shaft, it’s got an alloy head on it now because the cylinder head split, cracked and I couldn’t get a steel one, so I got an alloy head. When they were putting the alloy head on, did that at JME’s up at the Cape, in that workshop that Donald Healey used to have. So,

really, it's a works car. Done at the works, isn't it! [Laughs] So, yes, I
00:20:15 had all that done and then, as I say, there's always a bit of play in the
wheel, because it's a worm and peg, not rack and pinion, so you've
00:20:30 always got that bit of play. The indicator, that won't return sometimes
now, the indicator on the centre horn push.

00:20:45 I: You say that, after you finished working at the Cape, you went into the
RAF and then after you left the RAF you then went to work at Coten End.

GB: That's right – 1964.

I: So were you doing the same job as you did previously?

GB: Yes. I joined Fred because Fred Draper is the one who came and
00:21:00 asked me. When I came out of the Air Force, which was 1963, I got a job
at Leam Auto in Leamington, it was a BMC dealer at the top of the
00:21:15 Parade. I was there for about ten months I think, something like that.

Because Healey's, I couldn't get back there because they didn't need
anybody and of course they are not compelled to take you back if you
00:21:30 hadn't done just the two years of service. Anyway, Fred came knocking
at the door, and actually I was on holiday going along the South coast,
and a friend of mine, we used to be mates, friends right from little
00:21:45 toddlers, I was driving along Weymouth along the promenade, and there
was a bang on the roof of the car, and I thought it was some yobbos, and
it was Fred Wheeler and he said 'oh, Fred Draper wants a word with you'.

00:22:00 And I said "Oh, all right." And we went back the next day and I got in
touch with Fred and he said 'do you want to come back because Bill...'
there was a chap called Bill Allsop who used to be in there as well in the
stores, he used to do the packing and everything, and he said 'do you
want to come back?' and I said "Oh yes I would, because I didn't like it at

00:22:15 Leam Auto, it was a lot of the commercial stuff, so I went back there in

00:22:30 1964 in the Stores . It was a converted cinema, you'd got a showroom
on the front and the Stores were basically on the balcony at the top and
you've got the acoustics in there were quite loud. You had got Bill
00:22:45 Buckingham, the chap who used to hammer the body panels. They had
got these wooden bucks on the stage and he was hammering away and
00:22:45 they were doing the Sprite prototypes for Le Mans and they were

00:23:00 hammering away all the time and you had to shut the office door if you wanted to phone because being a cinema of course it was the acoustics. It used to really come back at you.

00:23:15 I: Was that the main place that people went to for spares at that time, at Healey's?

GB: It was, yes.

I: So, you would get people all over the country and from abroad as well? From America?

00:23:30 **GB:** Yes, most of it was sort of sent through the postal system. I mean, at the Cape, one of the American companies, they used to do an exhaust

00:23:45 system for the Sprite, a special exhaust, free flow, and Bill Allsop, he would make these great big cases up, there would be about twenty or

00:24:00 thirty systems in one case, going to America, and that was for the Sprite. I watched the prototypes – the Sprite Mark 1, I remember Barry Bilbie

00:24:15 going up Lock Lane in it one day, without any bodywork on, just the frame and it had got like a wooden, to make it legal, you'd got the lights

on a piece of wood on the back and the front, and I can remember him going up The Cape, up Lock Lane in a Sprite without any bodywork. So

00:24:30 when we saw the Sprite we thought how ugly it was, with those lights dumped on the top. We thought, crikey, it looks like they designed a car and then forgot the lights, the headlights. But of course the first

00:24:45 prototypes, they had a sort of a lift but it wasn't off the vacuum off the engine, it was operated by rods I think, but it wasn't very successful, so they decided to just put two lights in the top. And the first one, it was just

00:25:00 like headlights off a motorbike, something like that. But then they put the fairings at the back, that made it look like... but that's a collector's car

now, everybody's after them, now, aren't they? They had like a face on the front didn't it? Yes, as I say, the problem they had was where the

00:25:15 springs fitted in the quarter – they were a quarter elliptic springs and where they were mounted into the frame, they were starting to crack so

00:25:30 some of the Experimental lads tipped over and they were welding strengthening bits around those areas. But of course when it produced

00:25:45 properly it was sorted out.

I: And the spare parts that you supplied, at Coten End, where did they come from? Did they come from Abingdon for example, or were they made on site, or how did that happen?

GB: When, at Coten End?

I: Yes.

GB: Yes, we used to get from Leyland, we used to get the spares.

I: They used to send them through?

GB: Yes, that's right. We used to get quite a few, well, sort of every week we had a load come in.

I: So, did you keep a stock on site, or did you order it from them?

GB: No, we had a stock, we had tyres and everything in stock, body panels and of course people, there has been a lot over the years saying about how they don't fit – the new panels that we had reproduced. I know the early ones they were made up and the rear wing made in about three sections which before it was just like one pressing. You would get your tooling up from supposedly an original but of course at Jensens when they sort of assembled the bodies they used to try two or three wings and have the best one and then the others used to go out for spares, you see? So, you could never be sure that they were going to fit. Impossible, more or less. We had a job explaining that to customers but, Ted Bradnam he was a chap who worked at Coten End and he was in the body shop and he came and tried three or four rear wings and he said 'I think I'll have the first one', and I thought, oh crikey, which one's that? He said 'that's the nearest', the first one I brought. It just shows doesn't it that every car is different. Wing pressing would be the same, it's just the finishing of them. There were a lot of differences there.

I: So you stayed at Coten End until about 1972?

GB: 1974, because when the Healey finished in about 1968, wasn't it, the last one produced early 1968, they started selling MGBs then, MGBs, they sold quite a few MGBs at that time and then they gradually phased those out and then they said they were going to take on a Fiat franchise. So, Fred Draper, Stores, said one of us had to go and I said to Fred that I'll go because you're married and have got two daughters. 'No', he said,

'I don't want to get involved with Fiat, I'm going to set up on my own'.
00:28:45 And I said 'All right.' Anyway, he went up to see Geoff Healey and he
wanted to buy all the remaining spares, Austin Healey spares, with his
00:29:00 redundancy money which wasn't all that much really, so they agreed to it
and Geoff Healey thought he wasn't doing the right thing. He said 'I don't
think you are doing the right thing Fred.' He said 'As long as I can make
a reasonable living out of it' he said 'I'm going to do it'. If they was
00:29:15 stopping Healeys, altogether, supplies, there was that many customers
and so Fred, he left, and I stayed on as Stores Manager then for Fiat. I
had to go on a Fiat course down Brentford, which I didn't enjoy very
00:29:30 much, I must admit. We carried on with Fiat and Fred set up from his
home, He had windscreens under his bed and things like that and of
00:29:45 course they was phoning all through the night, all the American
customers, the foreign customers, but he was doing all right and then he
got some premises on the Tachbrook Road. It was a chap called Jack
00:30:00 Shepherd, he had this Jack Shepherd's Dairies and he was closed down
because it was in a right state and Fred, they sort of moved in, it was
00:30:15 next to Heathcote Garage actually and Fred moved in there. It was like a
narrow, a little door, you might have seen some photographs of it
somewhere? Anyway, it went back so far and Jack Shepherd was still
00:30:30 serving his family with bacon and eggs and everything at the back! And
00:30:45 he gradually cleared the sheds out at the back.

I: And then you stayed there until ...

GB: Yes, I joined... Fred said 'if ever I want anybody, obviously, you'll be
00:31:00 the first one I'll call on'. Meantime, Robert Hill, his nephew, had joined
him and Fred, he wanted to go in equal partner with Fred and Fred didn't
like that much. But anyway, that's how it had to be. It's when the VAT
00:31:15 came in, and everything, and Fred said 'I don't think I can cope with it'.
So anyway, young Robert carried on and as I say, the Fiat, the Fiat was
00:31:30 going to dry up, they were going on to a Renault dealership then and I
thought oh crikey I don't really want to get involved, and Fred came to my
rescue. He said 'would you like to join me, I think we could do with you
00:31:45 now'. So, anyway, that's what happened. That was 1974. And at the

time, Fred had booked a holiday to go off for a week or so and Robert
00:32:00 had to go in hospital for an operation so I spent a week there before they
both left me on my own. It was quite funny really, this chap came in for a
fan belt for his Healey and he said 'I came in last week and had one, but
00:32:15 I'm going to take one as a spare'. I said well I've no idea where they are,
and he had to come in and show me where they were because he had
been in previously [laughs]. But we managed alright.

00:32:30 I: It must have been nice to keep the Healey legacy going really though,
at that stage?

GB: Yes, that's right. Because Fred started it all up, you see, and all
these other companies have sort of followed suit, but Fred was the one.
00:32:45 You know he hadn't got any money for all these wing panels available
and rear shrouds for the Mark 3. He did buy some while I was with him,
he bought four or five, but they were scrapped I think their engines were
00:33:00 scrapped as well, brand new engines, things like that. But he just
couldn't afford to buy them. He couldn't get a loan from the bank at the
00:33:15 time. A lot of things. He just bought what he could. I think it was left-
hand front wings were the ones that were available. A chap called Derek
Ross used to help us out, he worked for Leyland at the time and he
00:33:30 looked into the records and found out what they had got in stock, left-
hand wings. Derek managed to buy them what they'd got.

I: Did you ever have any contacts with anybody else that you had worked
00:33:45 with previously at Coten End, for example?

GB: When I was with Fred? [pause]

00:34:00 I: I suppose after the business had closed..

GB: No, that's right. Not really, no, I don't think so. Derek Ross he was
00:34:15 at the Cape, Derek Ross was actually. And Andrew Wilson Gunn, he
was the, he used to go round the American bases selling the cars. Of
course, I'm going back now to the Cape days. He used to go round
00:34:30 selling the cars to the American Forces.

I: Did they ever come up to the Cape Works? You did mention that at the
beginning, some of the American Officers used to come.

00:34:45 **GB:** Yes, they did! Yes, when I went down the first day for the interview,

there were about a dozen. They were nearly all pilots, air crew.

I: Was that quite common?

GB: Yes. After that they used to come over and what they used to do, they used to fly over low in their jets, you know, they used to come over
00:35:00 in the jets and fly over low. There was a few complaints locally I think, in those days. They were like in their Thunderchiefs I think, something like that.

I: Because they could see all the cars in the car park? Is that what they were doing?

00:35:15 **GB:** Well they just flew over and they said, some of them, when they came in, 'oh we came over the other day, did you see us?' [Indistinct] see you ...heard you!. You couldn't do that nowadays, could you? Yes,
00:35:30 they used to fly over. And Eileen Tallis who was, she was on the switchboard at the Cape, Eileen, and she was courting a Squadron Leader who was training at Gaydon on the Valiant bomber, the first V
00:35:45 bomber and she came up to me and she said, and he got posted to Marham in Norfolk and I then think he was coming over in the Valiant to Gaydon for some reason and she used to come and say to me, because
00:36:00 she knew I was interested in aircraft, she used to come and say 'Gordon, Trevor is supposed to be coming over about 11 o'clock, he is going to fly over'. And sure enough about 11 o'clock you'd go outside and he sort of
00:36:15 cruised over in this Valiant and then opened it up and climbed steadily away. I don't know if she ever married him, she probably did, I don't know. Squadron Leader Trevor Ware his name was.

00:36:30 **I:** After you had left the Cape works and it had closed, did you ever go back, years later, to see what it looked like?

GB: Believe it or not, when I went in the Air Force, I was posted to
00:36:45 Stafford and when I had a bit of a leave I went back to Healey's to earn a bit of money, cash, and I was making up number plates and things like that, fitting them, and even changing the tyres, whitewall tyres, putting
00:37:00 whitewalls on, and I did that for a couple of times and then I came back on leave when I was in Germany, from Germany I came back once, and I
00:37:15 had bought myself a Mini over there, my Mini Bruggemanns in Dusseldorf

and when I came over I had got this rear silencer made up and an
00:37:30 adaptor and oil pipe and spare gear change for a Mini and it was all done
00:37:45 there. When I went back, the case weighed a ton. They made adaptors
up for me to fit the Mini at Healey's. After that, that was the last time I did
actually go there. But yes, I was making number plates up, plastic ones
00:38:00 which had plastic digits but then in the end they were sort of just the
pressed ones now, the pressed aluminium with the silver, but in those
days you could have some nice light lettering or silver lettering.

00:38:15 I: So when you are driving your Healey now, do you still get comments
from people?

GB: In what way?

I: About your car, because it is such a special car.

GB: Oh yes. It attracts attention wherever it goes, it really does. I mean,
00:38:30 it was only yesterday that I went to that fête and parked it up. We sort of
sat in front of the cars, my colleague's got a Daimler 250 Saloon, silver
00:38:45 coloured, parked next to me, and you could hear these people saying,
'Oh I like that'. I think they do because it hasn't got a wooden dash or
anything like that, and wind up windows, it's none of that, it's plug in side
00:39:00 screens. Sometimes I leave it with the windscreen flat, you can sort of
flatten it down, put it down there. It's got like what they call feet, screen
00:39:15 feet at the front, and I once had a French chap phoned me up and he
said 'I've got a car, a 100, but the wing mirrors have broken off, I've got
the bases but the wing mirrors have broken off' and I said 'where are they
then?' 'Just forward to the screen'. I said, well, I think they're for the
00:39:30 windscreen. He said 'no, no'. He thought they were wing mirror bases
and they had broken off. [Laughs] I explained to him, I thought they
00:39:45 would have explained it when he bought the car, but obviously didn't. He
couldn't understand quite what I was saying. There's little knobs on the
side and everybody asks 'why are these little knobs on the side? Then
00:40:00 you've got that spring on the bottom, that hooks on. Because when I first
made it, it tended to come back a bit, with the vibration, I think it tended
to come back out of the pegs on the foot, so they put these springs on
00:40:15 where the hood toggle goes normally on the top, hooks onto there, to

keep it down. I left it like that, not yesterday, but the other week at the
00:40:30 fête at Bishops Tachbrook. I parked it up with the screen flat. It creates
a bit more attention. I can't drive it like that though. You need some
goggles. Quite ingenious really. I don't know who designed that bit,
00:40:45 actually, I think it was Geoff, was it Geoff and Donald, together, I'm not
quite sure.

I: You mentioned earlier, you encountered Gerry Coker as well.

GB: Yes, he was there at the Cape. And Barry Bilbie he was the chassis
00:41:00 man, as I said, he went up the road in that Sprite, the first prototype with
no bodywork on it. Yes, Gerry Coker was there.

I: I suppose at that time, Donald was still living up here, wasn't he? Is that
00:41:15 right?

GB: Yes, he lived up Kenilworth Road in Leamington. I used to see, I
used to bike along Rugby Road and by the traffic lights you could see the
00:41:30 drive. He had got those Coups, you know those two Coupés. They built
two special Coupés, Donald's was red and black top, and then there was
00:41:45 a blue and silver top one. The blue and silver one was OAC 1 and then
ONX 113 was Donald's personal car. It had a 100 S engine in it and all
00:42:00 padding inside, a really nice car. I think it was sold not long ago, eight
hundred and fifty-three thousand or something like that? That was the
one. I saw it, a chap called Arthur Carter up near Kings Lynn, he'd got
00:42:15 these cars, up there, and we went up there to see and he wanted to get
rid of some spares at one time and it was supposed to be some 100 S
spares amongst it. And when we got up there, all 100 S spares had
gone, and he wanted to sell all the rest of it so we didn't take it. But he
00:42:30 showed us the cars he'd got and this ONX 113 was all red – it hadn't got
the black top and I said, 'That's not right,' I said 'Oh, yes, that's how it
00:42:45 was, with black top on it definitely.' I got quite aeriased at the time, I
thought – black top... It appears that who owned it before didn't like the
black top because it looked like a hard top, made it look like a separate,
00:43:00 like a hard top and that was the reason. He had got that OAC 1 there as
well, how he got hold of all these things, I don't know. He had got the
Rolls Royce engine one prototypes you know, Rolls Royce 4 litre, about

00:43:15 three of those were made, I think.

I: Had they still got many of the early models on site at the Cape when you worked there? I know they didn't produce them anymore but

00:43:30 examples of the products – Tickfords, Silverstone?

GB: Yes, as I said the Tickfords, the Elliots. Tom Wincott was working on that Alvis engine when I started with Tom, and the Alvis Healey and of course there was the Nash Healey as well which was exported to the States but this was the Alvis one.

00:43:45 I: So they were still getting customers coming in who had got those early models?

00:44:00 **GB:** For servicing, yes. And the Stores had Riley parts still in there. They were getting a bit taken over by the Austin Healeys of course. But you

00:44:15 still had them in. I mean one of the jobs I got was fitting the aluminium brackets to take the Silverstone chassis, a chassis they were building up. I remember putting these aluminium brackets on and that was just before

00:44:30 we went in the Stores to help Fred out, and then ended up in there. But it was the right move in the end because AH Spares grew and grew and

00:44:45 grew. Started in one unit in Southam and Fred says 'Well we will just put the racking on one side', that's two and a half thousand square feet of unit and he said well we shan't want all this space, we'll let the other half,

00:45:00 and we put the racking up and they have got four units now. We got the next unit and then the trim shop, and everything's brought forward

00:45:15 somewhat.

I: That's fantastic. Garry, have you got any other questions to add?

I2: I was just going to ask about when you finally left AH Spares, how long did you actually stay with them?

00:45:30 **GB:** I was there, it was 2010, I had a bit of a stroke – well, it wasn't a stroke, I don't know if it was a stroke or not, I went all numb down my side, all down here one Saturday morning and I went to the hospital and they couldn't find anything wrong. That was like 2010, March, and I

00:46:00 never actually went back to work after that. I was 71. And my sister said 'it's about time you gave it up, about time you finished, you've had your

00:46:15 warning'. Because it was quite strenuous the last few months. But now

it's much better, they've got more space. I used to check all the orders and could only do it when they'd gone, when they'd finished, at 6 o'clock,
00:46:30 so I was there until seven, half seven at night every night, checking all the orders off for them for the next morning, and things like that.

00:46:45 I: So is there anything else you want to add? That's been fantastic.

GB: I don't know really. We had a chap called Jack Mattocks from Coventry – this is going back to the Cape days and he was a little short
00:47:00 chap with a bald head and he came up to me once and said 'Hey Gord, I can't get this wheel nut on, I've got no threads left to put this wheel nut on' and I said what do you mean, and I said, 'Oh, it's one of those that has splined, they used to dry up and you couldn't get the wheel home
00:47:15 and when I went he had put it the wrong way round, he had got the wheel the wrong way round, and he'd pushed it up, not gently, he had pushed it up and of course you wouldn't, you don't. I said, Jack, it's the wrong way round, and he said 'Oh crikey, don't tell anybody will you!'. I pulled it off
00:47:30 and turned it round and put it back on. [Laughs] He used to carry the trap gauges, they were quite hefty things, the towing gauges, they had two long things with mirrors, he used to have a habit of putting them on his
00:47:45 shoulders and Geoff Price was stood there talking to a customer and he turned round and caught Geoff on the back of the head and Geoff said 'watch what you are doing!' and he come up to me [indistinct] ...accident',
00:48:00 he said,' it could happen to anybody'. [Laughs] But they used to do things really which – there was a chap called Dave Paget he is still about
00:48:15 now but he is going blind, Dave is. I spoke to him the other day and he lives up near, he was there at the Cape with me. He had a metal mug
00:48:30 they used to have this tea lady doing the ... and the wooden bench, and I came up for a long screw at the stores, I said longest screw with a leather washer and all that, [indistinct] and they'd only drilled his mug through,
00:48:45 through the bench and bolted it down. He was going like that you know. [Laughs]. Stupid things. That's what they used to do, all those sort of tricks.

I: An enjoyable atmosphere to work in then?

00:49:00 **GB:** Yes. I think the best, one of the best was, it's coming back to me

now, a chap called Bill Watson, he was the van driver and he was always playing about, always acting the fool, he never concentrated really on
00:49:15 what he was doing and they used to service Rolls Royces, they had a rolling road and they used to do Jensens and Rolls Royces service. And Bill had to take this radiator to P J Evans in Birmingham, the old unit. He
00:49:30 took it over there and the chap wanted to collect the Rolls the next day and he came back and Geoff Price said 'Bill, where's that rad'?' 'oh, it's in the back of the pick-up truck Geoff' and old Geoff Price says 'you've brought the old unit back!' You can imagine, he was playing about so
00:49:45 much over there – and the blokes over there said 'yes we couldn't believe it when he'd gone off', he said 'we've got the new one here' so he had to go back again and fetch it. But one of the best things, he went for a
00:50:00 breakdown, with a pick-up truck, it was a Jaguar Mark 2 that had broken down, just on the outskirts of Warwick and Bill went and fetched it and
00:50:15 came to the, along by, towards St John's, the traffic lights and when he pulled away, the rope broke, or something, or came undone and old Bill
00:50:30 carries on and then he turns into the Works, which was only a few hundred yards up, and this woman says 'excuse me, you've got a rope hanging at the back of your' and he says 'there is supposed to be a car on the end of that' he says [Laughs]. And when he went back to the chap
00:50:45 in the Jag, he managed to come along, park at the side and the bloke was laughing his head off. He couldn't believe it that he just carried on and he didn't even realise – that was the sort of chap he was. I couldn't
00:51:00 believe it. Yes, Bill Watson.

I: Well, thank you, that's been absolutely fantastic.

GB: There's probably other things which I can't think of at the moment
00:51:15 but, I'm sure there's other things.

I: That's been brilliant, we'll stop it there.

00:51:25 END OF RECORDING