Henry Ford was American and he lived between 1863 and 1947. He was born into a farming family, but didn’t want to become a farmer himself. His early working life was as an engineer and he invented a couple of vehicles before starting his first motor company, The Detroit automobile company. However, it was his later Ford Motor Company and his Model ‘T’ car which made him famous.

The Model ‘T’ was one of the first cars to have steering wheel on the left and it was easy to drive. It was also very cheap at $825 when it went into production in 1908, falling to $360 in 1916. After 5 years of production, Ford devised a method of mass production with the introduction of the ‘assembly line’. In this way, vehicles could be built faster due to more people working on just assembling one thing on many different cars along a conveyer belt at the same time so there is less confusion as to what people are doing. This enabled several cars to be built at the same time, rather than just one at a time. Increased production and reduced costs meant that the Model ‘T’ could be reduced in price but still produce a profit for the Ford. Many people who could not previously have afforded the more expensive models of car could buy Ford’s ‘Model T’.

In 1914, one year after his introduction of the assembly line, Ford decided to double his workers’ hourly pay. A constant turnover of staff, which meant new people needed training all the time and slowed production, led to the decision which then made The Ford Motor Company a good place to work attracting the best workers and keeping them.

Other companies copied Ford because the method got more products out into the shops, it was much cheaper and people did not need to have as much expensive training if they were only doing one, fixed job.

The ‘Model T’ obviously had a big impact on America because its production and appearance influenced people’s habits. People travelled more so the need for hotels, motels and leisure facilities was greater. This helped those industries grow and because people had more money than they were used to having they were more inclined to shop. The poor people, however, did not have much more money and so could not buy cars and concentrated still on earning enough money to live.

Henry Ford was significant in several other ways. He entered politics as a candidate for the US Senate in towards the end of WW1 in 1918 and was a strong supporter of the League of Nations proposed at the end of the war by Woodrow Wilson. Ford had gone into the aviation industry during the war with his Ford Airplane Company which went on to produce the first successful American passenger plane.