The 'Tortoise' stove, which goes all the way back to 1830, was the first heating appliance to offer fuel efficiency as a major selling point. It made its role in the development of our industry of great significance today.

Charles Portway built the first of these incredibly long-lasting stoves by hand to heat his ironmongery store in Halstead, Essex. After making a second stove for a neighbour, Mrs Portway suggested he go into business manufacturing and selling them. Over the next 50 years more than 17,000 of his stoves were sold, providing low cost and economical heating to thousands of people.

The secret of a solid fuel stove is how slowly it consumes the fuel, thus extracting the maximum amount of heat from the fuel. The significance of making fuel efficiency a key feature cannot be underplayed, particularly for today's industry, which is so focused on saving energy and making our domestic heating systems as efficient as possible. We could even go so far as to say that Mr Portway was the founding father of energy efficiency.

The basic Tortoise was adapted, over the years, for a number of different uses. They were used to heat churches and halls as well as homes and continued in use well into the 20th century.

In the early part of the 20th century minor internal modifications were made to keep the design up to date with regulatory requirements. Production continued for the next 80 years or so and quite a number of Tortoises can still be found today, making this one of the most acceptable, resilient and long-lived products in the history of our industry.

More pictures and details of historical products can be found on the CIBSE Heritage Group website at: www.bivac-heritage.org