

Compiled by Andy King, Bristol Museums, from several sources

PATENT NUMBERS

British patent numbers were allocated from 1617 and were numbered consecutively until 1853. Bennett Woodcroft, head of the Patents Office in the mid-19th century, drastically revised the system, for the first time introducing the requirement for proof of novelty. Pre-1852 patents can be traced through Woodcroft's **Alphabetical List Of Patentees of Inventions**.

From 1853 until 1916, numbers were allocated from No.1 every year, preceded by the year e.g. 1886/152. Unfortunately, manufacturers were adept at bending the rules. Often the year of issue was left off, meaning a very long search for a year of issue by a researcher today. References by name on makers' plates (e.g. **Smith's Patent**) often mean that a provisional patent was applied for, but that it was never granted; the only way to establish this is through the alphabetical lists of patentees, again searching year by year. To cap all of this, spurious numbers are often quoted; occasionally these 'patent' numbers are Registered Design Numbers, which can be checked against a list of these.

From the start of 1916 published patent specifications were numbered in a series starting at 100,001 in January 1916, separate from patent application numbers. The majority of patent applications filed before 1 July 1978 had been granted by the early 1980s, eventually reaching a little over 1,605,000; there are no British patent numbers between 1,610,000 and 2,000,000.

Patent applications filed after 1 July 1978 have been published with seven figure serial numbers beginning with '2'.

Patents are issued in other countries too, of course. It is possible to find a lot of these online now, particularly for the USA.

Note: After 1916 generally only granted patents were published; those not granted were never published and no information on them is now available. However following the introduction of the Patents & Designs Act 1907 (Section 91[4]), patent applications originating abroad and which claimed priority were laid open for public inspection after 12 months (later, 18 months), if not granted by then; many of the patent applications laid open were also printed and given numbers in the six-figure series – these are available. The practice of printing these foreign applications ceased during World War 11, and was abolished under the Patents Act 1949.

The following table shows the lowest patent number for specifications published in each calendar year.

Lowest/earliest British Patent number published in each calendar year							
Year	Patent No		Year	Patent No		Year	Patent No
1916	100,001		1946	574,006		1976	1,424,101
1917	102,812		1947	583,360		1977	1,464,401
1918	112,131		1948	595,746		1978	1,500,801
1919	121,611		1949	614,704		1979	1,540,351
1920	136,852		1950	633,754		1979	2,000,001
1921	155,801		1951	650,921		1980	1,560,781
1922	173,241		1952	667,061		1980	2,023,381
1923	190,732		1953	687,841		1981	1,584,601
1924	208,751		1954	704,741		1981	2,050,131
1925	226,571		1955	724,991		1982	2,078,071
1926	244,801		1956	745,421		1983	2,100,561
1927	263,501		1957	768,941		1984	2,121,661
1928	282,701		1958	791,071		1985	2,141,611
1929	302,941		1959	809,321		1986	2,160,751
1930	323,171		1960	829,181		1987	2,176,681
1931	340,201		1961	861,801		1988	2,192,121
1932	363,615		1962	889,571		1989	2,206,271
1933	385,258		1963	918,311		1990	2,220,118
1934	407,311		1964	949,031		1991	2,232,862
1935	421,246		1965	982,551		1992	2,245,131
1936	439,856		1966	1,015,491		1993	2,257,003
1937	458,491		1967	1,058,501		1994	2,268,036
1938	477,016		1968	1,102,801		1995	2,279,218
1939	497,409		1969	1,142,501		1996	2,290,445
1940	512,178		1970	1,180,651		1997	2,302,005
1941	530,617		1971	1,222,451		1998	2,314,495
1942	542,024		1972	1,263,601		1999	2,326,809
1943	550,067		1973	1,306,401		2000	2,338,877
1944	558,091		1974	1,346,401		2001	2,351,428
1945	566,191		1975	1,384,031		2002	

Figures in ordinary type from table headed 'lowest patent number for specifications published in each calendar year'

Figures in italic from table headed 'Earliest patent number published each year under the Patent Act 1977'

See also http://worldwide.espacenet.com/?locale=en_GB for British and <http://www.uspto.gov/patents/process/search/index.jsp> for US Patents