

HISTORICAL PATENTS



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Patents can be a fascinating source of historical information, whether you're tracing the development of a particular technology, or trying to find out more about one of the inventors in your family. Plymouth Central Library holds a range of resources that can help you identify and trace historic patents.

NAME INDEXES 1617-1980

- *The Alphabetical Index of Patentees of Inventions 1617-1852* (printed and microfiche)
- *UK Patents for Invention: Index to Names of Applicants 1853-1980* (microfiche)

If you are searching for a particular inventor, the name index will allow you to identify whether a patent was taken out. For early patents, the printed volume 1617-1852 allows you to search all years by name. If a patent was taken out, you'll find the patent number, date and year, and subject matter of the patent.

For patents taken out after 1853, you can find similar information on microfiche, held in the History Room. You will, however, need to search each year individually – if you know the dates your inventor was working, this will speed up your search considerably!

PATENT ABRIDGMENTS, 1855-1930

The Library holds abridgments of patents published in Britain between 1855 and 1930. These consist of a short summary of the patent specification, and, in many cases, a diagram. As many of the abridgments volumes are in a delicate condition, please contact us in advance if you'd like to consult them.

Abridgments are organised by date and class. For example, cameras are in 'Abridgment Class 98: Photography'. The *Abridgment Class and Index Key, Volume 1 (1927)*, shelved in the Quiet Room, will give you the class number you need. Each class is then broken down by year, within the abridgments themselves.

ESPACENET

Espacenet is a free online database containing patent specifications, most of which are full text, drawn from patent offices internationally. The UK collection is reasonably comprehensive from 1930-present. It is also worth checking Espacenet if the patent you require dates from the period 1890-1930 – coverage is not complete for this date range, but you may find the item you need.

To access Espacenet, go to <http://worldwide.espacenet.com/>.

To search, click on Advanced Search (top left hand side of the screen) and enter your keywords in the **keyword in title or abstract** box. If you wish to limit your search by date enter the years in the **publication date** box. For example entering **1930 1935** will find patents published between

1930 and 1935. Click on any of the titles in the list, to get more information. In many cases, a box at the top left-hand side of the screen will allow you to view the original document.

ORDERING PATENT SPECIFICATIONS

Plymouth Libraries do not hold the full specifications of older patents. However, Sheffield Reference and Information Library hold most full patent specifications from 1617 to 1908, and can supply copies via email or on CD. You will need to know the year the patent was published, and the patent number before contacting them.

There is a charge for this service. For further information, please contact Reference and Information at Sheffield Central Library:

Telephone: 0114 2734736

Email: information.library@sheffield.gov.uk

Online: <http://www.sheffield.gov.uk/informationlibrary>

FURTHER INFORMATION

For help with searching, or if you need any further information, please contact us:

Telephone: 01752 306795

Email: patlibuk@plymouth.gov.uk

Online: <http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/plymouthpatlib>