

Patents, Designs and Trade Marks 1974

92nd Report of the
Comptroller-General of Patents, Designs and Trade Marks

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Applications for prolongation of patents because of war loss have naturally fallen away over the years and only one application was made in 1974; the relevant Sections 24 and 25 are now practically a dead letter. A noteworthy and welcome drop in activity has been a fall from 155 to 112 in the number of applications for the restoration of patents which have unintentionally been allowed to lapse; this fall shows perhaps that patentees are taking greater care in maintaining their rights.

At the application stage, two points are noteworthy. There was considerable activity in applying for protection for medical and like treatments and at the end of the year judgments were awaited from the appellate authorities which will establish a firm practice on whether or not patents should be granted for such methods. In 1974 the number of extensions of three months sought for putting an application in order increased from 2,577 to 3,065. As all these cases must be dealt with urgently if the applications are to be saved, considerable disruption, with consequent inefficiency, is caused in the Office routine and the technical examination and the dialogue with the applicant or his agent have to be rushed. Applicants also risk their applications becoming void if they leave action to the very end of the permitted period.

The joint Official Side/Staff Side working party, mentioned in previous reports, continued to meet during the year to pursue the study of the problems arising from the proposal to introduce the European Patent system.

* *Trend of inventions in published specifications*

Because of the difference between the dates of publication of patent specifications and their application dates, the trends noticeable in specifications published during the year were often directed to the solution of problems that became of particular interest two to four years previously, such as the prevention of environmental pollution and the provision of safety devices in vehicles.

In the field of environmental pollution prevention there was much activity in incinerators for toxic waste liquids, while the treatment of waste gases from industrial processes by physical and chemical methods continued to be of importance. Modifications of reciprocating internal combustion engines were directed to reducing the output of noxious exhaust products.

Among vehicle safety devices, apparatus for preventing the accidental locking of steering column locks appeared as a new development. The use of digital control in anti-skid braking systems is increasing and automatic systems for warning of brake-failure have been actively developed.

Two new trends in the printing art have appeared. These are 'sublimatic transfer printing' in which a disperse dyestuff is sublimed on to a substrate, particularly man-made textiles; and 'ink drop printers' in which a stream of uniform ink droplets are impinged upon a paper strip to build up an impression.

Advances in the electrical field include the development of small solid-state cells for implantation in the human body in cardiac pacemakers and of electric cookers using induction heating elements. Much activity has been noted in producing gas discharge tubes for display purposes. Such tubes may be used for computer read-outs and flat television screens.

In the semi-conductor field further development has taken place in charge-coupled devices which were first reported last year and in the application of semi-conductors to known electric protective systems.

The number of specifications accepted in 1974, divided according to subject-matter, and the headings in which the above activity is classified, are given in Appendix 7. * END

Fees

An account of receipts from fees is given in Appendix 8. Despite the fall in the level of business, renewal fees receipts rose from £4,011,823 to £4,367,467 and fees payable on filing complete specifications rose from £1,083,434 to £1,095,276. These increases are attributable to fee increases effective from May 1974.

Patents in force

Appendix 9 shows the number of renewal fees paid in each of the twelve years 1963-74 and the number of patents in force in 1974 to end of fourth year (as at 31 December 1974).

Other matters

Information about Certificates of the Comptroller, Oppositions, Revocations, Compulsory Licences, Extensions of Term, other miscellaneous requests and applications and the Register of Patent Agents is given in Appendices 10 to 14.

Appendix 10 shows that, for the first time for many years there has been a substantial drop (15 per cent) in the requests for certified copies of documents for filing abroad, indicating a future reduction in protection for British inventions in foreign countries. Appendix 10 also shows that the rate of filing oppositions to the grant of a patent has dropped to less than half its level of ten years ago.

(b) Designs

4,183 applications were received in 1974, 358 (nearly 8 per cent) fewer than in 1973, though the rate of reduction is lower than in recent years. 150 of these applications were for designs to be applied to textile articles and 104 for designs to be applied to sets of articles as against 126 and 81 respectively in 1973.

Applications were fewer for nearly all articles, by as much as 50 per cent for some, such as cookware, fastenings, ventilation equipment, pumps and stationery, but nevertheless included a rise of nearly 50 per cent for games, toys and sports equipment. The commonest applications, for articles such as hand tools, supports and particularly furniture, dropped by 20 per cent.

An analysis of applications received and designs registered from 1965 to 1974 is given in Appendix 15. The applications for those years are shown graphically in Appendix 19. Appendix 15 confirms that design registration is now little used for textile articles.

More applications were received from abroad this year and they account for 45.4 per cent of the total compared with 40.8 per cent in 1973. 42.2 per cent of the total from abroad was from Europe (48.5 per cent in 1973) and 19.2 per cent from the United States of America (18.7 per cent in 1973).