

SPECIALISTS IN QUALITY  
SINCE 1912  
**GILLINGHAM & Co.**  
  
FAMILY FOOTWEAR

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### **PEDOSCOPE FOOT X-RAY MACHINE**

The Pedoscope was in Gillingham's shoe shop in Fulham from the early 1950's until it was donated to the Thackray Museum in January 2003.

It was in active use as an x-ray machine from 1952 until the early 1970's. The machine was bought by Theodore Gillingham as a tool for seeing, visually, the position of the feet in a pair of shoes. Customers buying shoes would be informed that a properly fitted shoe required a certain amount of space between the end of the toes and the end of the shoe; with the X-ray picture in the Pedoscope they could see the amount of growing space for themselves.

It is often difficult for customers to know how much growing room there is in shoes. The Pedoscope gave reassurance to the customer, as it gave an added visual dimension to the normal method of assessing foot and shoe size – that is, the foot measure.

During its heyday, the Pedoscope had pride of place in most reputable shoe shops. Although a considerable investment at the time, it was seen as an invaluable aid to any business that prided itself on careful shoe-fitting. A stylishly-designed machine, its high-tec function – buttons to press and an x-ray picture of feet that actually moved - brought a touch of wizardry, modernity and glamour to shoe-shopping.

At Gillingham's all the staff used the machine as trained shoe fitters. They received extra in-house training led by Theodore Gillingham and shop manager Shirley Ford on the basis of guidelines laid down by the Pedoscope Co. The X-ray fitting sign was placed in the shop window and we referred to its use in our newspaper and magazine ads of the time.

The method of operating the machine was to place the feet on the screen and switch it on for bursts of 12 seconds, then off for 20 secs so that the tube didn't heat up. The adult customer looked through the viewing portal on the top, while children looked through the smaller one half way up the machine. The shop assistant and/or parent or partner of the customer used the portals on each side. At the back was a handle to move a pointer to show aspects of the foot and the position of the shoe in relation to it.

Customer response was positive in the early years. People loved peering through the eye-piece at the skeleton of their feet below and it was often difficult to keep children away from it. When the shop was crowded, especially at busy 'back to school' periods, staff had a battle to stop children working it themselves and putting hands as

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well as feet onto the x-ray screen. Parents often insisted on seeing their childrens' feet in the dozen or so pairs of shoes, boots or sandals they tried on, no matter what warnings the staff gave about the dangers of over-use.

The risk of radiation from x-ray machines was not an issue in the UK public mind in the 1950's, but attitudes made a radical shift in the 1960's as the public became aware of the link between x-rays and cancer. The Pedoscope at Gillingham's was adapted and lead-lined for safety and regularly serviced in line with government guidelines on public health and regularly serviced, but growing concern – including a critical article in the medical journal Lancet - sounded the death knell of its use in shoe-shops.

The machine at Gillingham's was unplugged, but instead of being broken up or sold off as happened in most shoe shops, it was kept as an exotic piece of showroom furniture for the next 30 years. Children loved to climb the steps and poke things into the viewing portals (which eventually had to be covered up to protect the screen below) and it became a great talking point with parents and grandparents in the 'Haven't seen one of these for years!' and 'I remember when I was a kid, shoe-shopping with my mum....' vein.

Gillingham's has always been a shop where traditional values of good service, wide choice and well-trained staff have been a high priority. It is ironic that the mellowed light oak, sleek lines and chrome trim of the Pedoscope – initially so very high tec and cutting edge in the '50's - came eventually to be seen as a comforting embodiment of these traditional values.

We wish it well in its new educational incarnation at Thackray Museum.

Paul Gillingham, Betty Barnard, Shirley Ford  
Partners, **Gillingham & Co.**

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