

Hopewood

1944 – 1970

Other Names:

- Hopewood Children's Home
- Hopewood Home
- Hopewood House
- The Hopewood Experiment
- Bailey House
- Belhaven and Hopewood Infants Homes

Details

Hopewood, in Bowral, was a children's home operated by the Youth Welfare Association of Australia (YWAA), which was founded by Leslie Owen Bailey. Bailey gathered 86 babies from unmarried mothers from 1942 until 1951 and raised them at Hopewood, and at smaller institutions in New South Wales, using his principles of 'natural health'. Hopewood closed in 1970, after the Hopewood children reached adulthood.

Hopewood was an experiment started by L.O. 'Daddy' Bailey, to raise 43 male and 43 female babies in a perfect environment, using his philosophies of 'natural health' or 'natural living'.

The 86 'Hopewood Children', or 'Hopewoods', were told they were orphans and raised as 'brothers and sisters', although they were not adopted, or legally fostered. Bailey fed them all a vegetarian diet of mostly raw food, never allowed vaccination and avoided modern medicine. He recorded their progress, with assistance from doctors and dentists, and published widely about the success of his methods.

In the late 1930s L.O. Bailey, a wealthy lingerie and clothing manufacturer (he owned the string of Chic Salon underwear stores), decided to test his ideals of natural living and natural health by conducting an experiment. He set up [Belhaven](#) in Bellevue Hill as a home for mothers and babies in October 1942. Approximately 200 women gave birth in Belhaven, and Bailey selected some of their babies to raise from birth. He recruited more through Hopewood.

In 1943 Bailey created the Youth Welfare Association of Australia (YWAA) to manage Belhaven, and it purchased Hopewood that year to house the babies from Belhaven, and to house new babies. Hopewood was a grand mansion in Bowral, built in 1884 for Ben Marshall Osborne, who named it after his own son, Hamilton Hope. Later it became a country house for Lebbaeus Hordern (who also built Hopewood House in Bellevue Hill). In 1925 it was bought by SE Sibley, who established a dairy and piggery, as well as tulip gardens, on the 746 acre site.

The YWAA converted the flower gardens to vegetable patches to feed the children, closed in the verandahs and converted the stables to The Pavilion, to make room for the children. The new Hopewood Home was officially opened by Acting Prime Minister Frank Forde in November 1944. A full-time staff was hired and Bailey and his assistant, Mrs Cockburn, visited weekly.

The purpose of the Hopewood experiment – a term Bailey used himself – was to measure and monitor the children and see how they fared under Bailey's diet and exercise program for natural health or natural living. Bailey involved doctors and dentists in his program and had the children tested and measured. He then published the results in newspaper articles, medical journals and newsletters.

In 1952, Bailey told the *Sydney Morning Herald* that the children's teeth were far better than other Australian or New Zealand children and said this was because of the Hopewood diet of food "in its natural state": milk, salad vegetables, fruit, nuts, dates, honey, dried fruits, linseed and wholemeal porridge, bread or biscuits, cooked vegetables, molasses, wheat hearts, prunes, cheese, soya beans, treacle, eggs, butter and unpolished rice. A dental journal article from 1963 remarked in passing that the diet of the Hopewood children was low in calorie intake (Harris, 1963).

A series of articles about "the biology of the children of Hopewood House" was published in the *Australian Dental Journal* in 1958. In the introductory article, the author recorded his "gratitude and indebtedness" to Bailey, Mr and Mrs JA Zanadoroff and the staffs of the Hopewood Homes; Dr and Mrs GC Scott, Mrs FW Clements, Mr DA Cameron and Mr PD Barnard.

This article went into detail about how the institution managed to maintain the same strict diet for the Hopewood children. The author writes that:

At first the children were all accommodated at Hopewood House itself but as they grew older it became for various reasons desirable to establish annexes in other parts of New South Wales. Nevertheless the same dietary regime and general conditions of life have been observed wherever the children were situated and these have remained substantially unchanged over the years. Moreover, for administration and other reasons the children were moved from one location to another, which minimized their exposure to such minor local differences as might exist. The children have attended various schools, and their lunch, which is eaten in a classroom before they mix with their fellows in the playground, has conformed to the overall dietary pattern observed in the Home itself. (Goldsworthy, 1958, pp.309-310)

The article does mention that in the last year of the study, 1956, evidence appeared that some of the Hopewood children had used a portion of their pocket money to buy sweets. "Nevertheless such defections from the dietary regime of the Home have been relatively insignificant".

Bailey was unable to isolate the children as he had hoped. He clashed with the Child Welfare Department, which maintained oversight and insisted the children attend local schools. If the children got sick, Bailey blamed their attendance at school. Bailey also had continual problems getting staff he could trust, and complained that they failed to enforce his diet or keep the house clean, and mistreated the children.

As the children reached their teenaged years, Bailey moved them into group homes, in Maroubra, Manly, Narrabeen, Mosman and Canberra. The 1958 dental journal article reported that children continued to spend two weeks at the 'mother house' in Bowral every Christmas (Goldworthy, 1958).

Some of these children in group homes remained under supervision, but as one woman who grew up in Hopewood reported to the Senate Inquiry Into Institutional Care, girls were also sent out as servants, or placed in the [Convent of the Good Shepherd in Ashfield](#). An article by Alan Gill also mentions girls from Hopewood being sent to the Good Shepherd nuns if they did not "make the grade" at Hopewood (Gill, 2003).

An article from 1994 claims that about a third of the Hopewood girls were placed in the Home of the Good Shepherd (Tom & Russell, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1994). The same article details the experiences of three Hopewood girls who were placed in service as teenagers on a sheep station in rural New South Wales. One of them described it as slave labour, working days beginning at 5am and rarely finishing before 11.30pm (Russell, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1994).

A 1963 dental journal article mentioned the "dispersion" of the Hopewood children from the institution at Bowral, following their entry into secondary schools and outside employment. This meant that only 52 children were available to be examined by the dental researchers in 1961. Harris wrote that the children's diets changed once they were living outside the Home, "where they could not readily obtain the foods they were accustomed to eating" (Harris, 1963). As children left the Home, the researchers had no means to keep measuring the dental health of the Hopewood children, but the author noted that as the children matured, "the opportunity for indulging

in confections and white-flour products was not wasted by the majority of the Hopewood children" (Harris, p.1396).

By the early 1960s, the only children left at Hopewood were boys who were studying or running the dairy.

Bailey died suddenly in 1964, but his ideas continued to be promoted by Mrs Cockburn, who took over the YWAA and set up [Bailey Cottage](#). The YWAA gave Hopewood, together with money for its restoration, to a Catholic order, the Society of St Gerard Majella. Bailey had left instructions that Hopewood should continue to be used for youth welfare and the order was chosen after Mrs Cockburn heard some members sing at the Moss Vale wedding of a Hopewood boy, Ronald, in 1966. The Society took possession of the property in 1970 and ran the house as a retreat and youth centre until 1994, when the order was closed because three senior members were convicted of the sexual abuse of children and trainee priests.

Hopewood House, and its garden and the Pavilion, were sold in 1997 and has been restored by successive owners. The house is listed in the Wingecarribee Shire Council Heritage Inventory. The property operated as a luxurious accommodation and function centre and wedding venue from 2007, and the owners hosted regular reunions of the Hopewood children. In October 2012 the property was sold to new owners.

Bailey's ideas live on in the Natural Health Society, which maintains a strong stance on vegetarianism and against vaccination, and in Hopewood Retreat, a vegetarian health spa. Bailey's articles on Hopewood are often cited by anti-vaccination campaigners who claim that the health of the Hopewood children proves vaccinations and mainstream medicine are unnecessary. However, the Hopewood children were small in number and isolated from the mainstream. In any case, studies of their health and welfare stopped in the 1950s, and there is no information about their health in adult life.

Memories of Hopewood

One former resident of Hopewood, Catherine Harrison, recalled being bullied at school but said that it was bearable because "there was a great feeling of brother-and-sisterhood. Eight of my 'brothers' were in the class and they all stood up for me" (quoted in Penglase, *Orphans of the Living*). Although the Hopewood children grew up close, it seems that rifts have developed in the group over time. While some Hopwoods feel certain they were loved and raised well by 'Daddy' Bailey and his assistant, Florence 'Madge' Cockburn, others recall abuses and feel exploited by Bailey's experimentation. Some have found adult life to be extremely challenging, leaving a sad legacy for their own children and grandchildren. The differences in the memories of the Hopwoods is a source of pain and confusion.

One Hopewood child told the Senate Inquiry into Institutional Care that she was raised to believe she was an orphan, and unwanted, although her mother had tried to reclaim her (Submission 337). In her submission this woman wrote that she felt 'Hopwoods' were not raised to function in the real world, received no nurturing or love, and had poor educations, low skills and no sense of how to look out for life's dangers. She complains bitterly about the diet, which she says they were forced to eat. Her words are quoted with her spellings:

We were on a strict vegterterian diet, most of the food was uncooked vegetables (ie beetroot, sweds, turnip, parsnips, pumpkins) which were fed to us RAW These vegetables in their raw state were horrible, we also had salads (tomatos, lettuce) with chick peas, soya beans and a small amount of cheese and eggs. The only cooked vegetable we had was potatos, others ie carrots cauli cabbage, peas and beans were either cooked or raw. We had no meat or fish. We were always hungry, so stealing from the staff kitchen was rife. We were never allowed into the kitchen to learn cooking. [Original spelling].

The woman remembers that when she seriously cut herself on a dirty pipe and was taken to hospital for stitches and a tetanus injection Bailey tried to stop the doctors from giving her the vaccination. According to the submission, most illnesses were treated with extended fasting and purging. The darkest memories of her time in the home relate to physical assaults and sexual abuse.

Her submission states that in 1958 Bailey decided to dispose of most of the girls under his care, sending some out as domestic servants and 13 to the Good Shepherd Convent in Ashfield. It describes this decision as "very strange" and says the "rather naïve" girls were forced to work in the commercial laundry until they reached 18, at which point they were cast out to live independent lives, with just a pound note and a small suitcase.

According to FM Cockburn, the Youth Welfare Association of Australia paid the Convent an amount per girl per week, but Submission 337 expresses the author feels mystified that she and the other girls were suddenly seen as so bad that they were placed in a home that was "a de-facto prison where girls who were convicted by the courts were sent to serve their sentences".

The author of Submission 337 says the legal position of the children, who were not state wards or adopted, was unclear and the only record she received of her time in Bailey's care was her birth certificate, although she did manage to find her mother. She says:

We were told from an early age that we were war orphans and that we should be glad and grateful for what L.O.B did for us. We heard that story all our lives. We were lied to all our lives.

Deborah Ambery, whose mother grew up in Hopewood, has written 2 theses and several articles about Bailey's experiment. As Ambery has written, Bailey promoted himself as a charitable man, doing a kindness for orphan children. However, she believes the children came a distant second to his goal of convincing the dental and medical establishment of the worth of his ideas.

Dr Ambery argues Bailey's ideas were a mix of fears about the loss of a white Australia, and the need to breed the right sorts of people – an idea that was eugenic. Bailey did hold some of these views and said in 1943:

If we want to produce a race of super people, capable of holding Australia 50 years hence, we must start right now. We won't admit coloured people and whites won't come in sufficient numbers. Consequently, we will need to produce a population composed of supermen and women. Since we won't have sufficient numbers, we must have quality.

Ambery has written that all the children were blonde and had blue eyes, which was Bailey's vision for a perfect Australia. However Trop says the children were not selected and photographs show a number were in fact dark-haired and dark-eyed, and some were mixed race.

An article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* from 5 February 1994 described the Hopewood children as bitterly divided:

*One side of the family is speaking for the first time about the horrors they say they have suffered as a result of their bizarre and fanatical upbringing, claiming they endured sexual, physical and psychological abuse within Bailey's institutions. Some believe the charismatic millionaire was an "Australian Hitler" who used them in an experiment to socially engineer a super race. But the condemnation is far from universal. There is another, larger group of adult Hopewood children who can't speak highly enough of Daddy Bailey and his second-in-command, "Aunty Madge" Cockburn ... They say the illegitimate children under his care were regarded as wartime debris and had little or no life prospects. "Without Daddy Bailey we'd have nothing," they exclaim, reporting only happy memories of their childhood and expressing outrage that anyone could speak ill of their father figure. The two accounts of the Hopewood homes and Daddy Bailey vary so greatly they sound like two different places, two different men ('Blind vision', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1994).*

The Hopewoods with fond memories of their childhoods remain close to their 'brothers and sisters'. They meet regularly for reunions, and go on holidays together. They also report a high degree of success and happiness in their lives. Few have, as yet, written about these more positive experiences.

Gallery



Hopewood

Description: This is a copy of an image from *A Gift of Love: The Hopewood Story*. The image shows the outside of Hopewood.



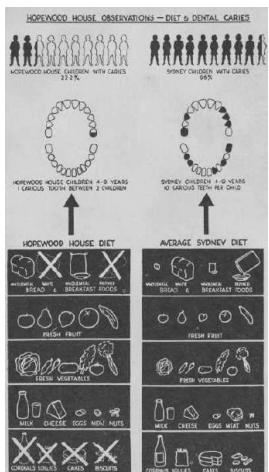
Special school bus for Hopewood children

Description: This is a copy of an image from *A Gift of Love: The Hopewood Story*. The image shows the school bus for children who attended Hopewood.



Meal time at Bowral, 1943

Description: This is a copy of an image from *A Gift of Love: The Hopewood Story*. The image shows the children during a meal time at Hopewood.



Hopewood House observations - diet and dental caries

Description: This is a copy of an image from *A Gift of Love: The Hopewood Story*.

More info

Related Entries

Run by

- Youth Welfare Association of Australia (1942 - 1985)

The Youth Welfare Association was set up to run Belhaven and Hopewood by LO Bailey.

Related Glossary Terms

- Eugenics (1890s - 1950s)

Related Organisations

