

# Dalwood Children's Home

1924 – 1989

**Other Names:**

- Dalwood Home
- Dalwood House
- Dalwood
- Dalwood Health Home
- Dalwood Rest Home

## Details

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Dalwood Children's Home, at Seaforth, was a home for mothers and babies set up by the Food for Babies Fund in 1924. In 1931 it began to provide temporary accommodation for children. In 1989 Dalwood stopped operating as a children's home. Non-residential programs continue on the site, in 2024 it is known as the [Dalwood Spilstead](#) family intervention and support service.

Dalwood is named after A.E. Dalwood, who leased his property 'Clavering' to George Fitzpatrick, the Chairperson of the Food For Babies Fund in 1924. In 1928, Dalwood donated the property, placing the Home in trust to be utilised only for children's services.

It is located at Seaforth, but is sometimes described as being in Balgowlah, both of which suburbs are close to Manly.

The Home was formally opened in 1930, part of the festivities being Flight Lieutenant Charles Ulm demonstrating flying feats in his biplane.

In 1931 Dalwood Home was incorporated as a second schedule public hospital, and was expanded to support families who could not meet the needs of children in their own homes by providing short term care. It was managed by an independent community board.

Fundraising for Dalwood was carried out, in large part, by the Dalwood Dog Show Committee, which began operating in 1932 and, in 2024, continues as an annual event. The Home also received patronage from well-known Australian figures – in 1934 the cricketer Don Bradman, the aviator Sir Charles Kingsford Smith and the actress Gladys Moncrieff were made life governors.

Early representations of Dalwood in newspaper articles reflect the aims of the Food for Babies Fund, and show how children largely went to the Home for temporary care, then returned to their families. In 1933, *The Australian Women's Weekly* described 'Dalwood Rest Home' as being 'for overworked mothers, girls, convalescent and under-nourished children, and children whose mothers are in hospital.' Another article from 1932 described its residents as "slum children" and portrayed them as having been rescued from a life of squalor. In contrast, Dalwood is described as a "health home for children" – "Kiddies have gone to Dalwood shockingly wasted through malnutrition, and they have returned after a month of proper care happy little citizens" (*The Labor Daily*, 1932).

An article from 1952 states that children from Dalwood attended Balgowlah Public School. This article demonstrates that most children were at Dalwood for temporary care. It stated that "children are taken in, mostly

for short terms, from homes where because of sickness or some other reason the parent or parents find it necessary to seek help in caring for their children" (*The Methodist*, 1952).

The Home was expanded from the 1940s, as increasing numbers of children of servicemen were admitted. From 1931 to 1989 over 2,000 children resided at the Home, for short or long-term residential care. By 1966 the Home's residents averaged 56 at any one time. In 1978 a day care centre was established. In 1983 the Byrnes family donated funds for a residential cottage for disadvantaged children.

One former resident describes how Dalwood's gothic building reminded her of "terrifying picture-book castles and, somehow, of Transylvania and vampires". Jo Parnell remembers being separated from her sibling, and living with "other shocked little girls – each wrapped in her own misery, each a number instead of a name". Her account of life at Dalwood is in stark contrast to the newspapers that used to call it "the house on happiness hill". She writes about the children being made to do housework at Dalwood, and living a harsh existence: "... every morning a bell dragged us from our cots to wash in ice-cold water, to dry our cold hands and faces on a sopping wet corner of the grey communal towel, to brush our hair with the communal hairbrush, and to brush our teeth with the communal tooth-brush" (Jo Parnell, 2012).

The residential programmes at Dalwood closed in 1989. Early intervention programs and other services for disadvantaged children and vulnerable families continue to be provided on the site in the legacy of the original Dalwood bequest.

In 1991 the site became the responsibility of the Northern Sydney Area Health Service (then known as the Manly-Warringah Area Health Service).

The work of the Dalwood Auxiliary continues to fund multidisciplinary services for families and children, through the Dalwood Spilstead Service.

Many photographs of children and carers from the 1930s and 1940s are held by the State Library of New South Wales and are available online.

The principal building, formerly known as 'Clavering', is heritage listed. It was built as a family retreat by Theodore Gurney, a Professor of Mathematics at Sydney University. He named it Clavering after the village in Essex where his father had been vicar. After Gurney's return to England in 1902 the building lay vacant for many years. It was acquired by A.E. Dalwood who sold off the land surrounding this grand home in 1922. Dalwood retained the house and a small acreage around it, but never lived in it. Reportedly Mrs Dalwood had concerns about isolation, snakes and bushfires. Theodore Gurney and A.E. Dalwood are remembered by street names in the suburb of Seaforth: Gurney Crescent, Clavering Road and Dalwood Avenue.

## Gallery

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**Children at play, Dalwood Homes, Balgowlah**



**Dalwood Home at Seaforth**

**Description:** The image shows the outside of Dalwood Children's Home. The image file has the note: "A gift from wealthy real estate man, Sir Arthur Dalwood, establishing the famous charity trust." (Ted Hood, 13/9/1988)

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**Little boy in cot**

**Description:** This image was used in the National Museum of Australia's 'Inside: life in children's Homes and institutions' exhibition. The image was taken at Dalwood Children's Home at Seaford.

## More info

### Related Entries

#### Related Organisations

- [Northern Sydney Local Health Network Medical Records](#)

Northern Sydney Local Health Network Medical Records manages the records of Dalwood Children's Home.

### Resources

- Kenneally, Christine, [The Forgotten Ones: half a million lost childhoods](#), The Monthly, August 2012
- Kids Charity, [Friends of the Dalwood Spilstead](#), 2012
- Hamilton, Vera, [The Children's Claim: The Community Fooths a Heavy Bill Annually to Keep Little Faces Smiling - And Reaps a Dividend in Happiness](#), The Sun, 10 June 1932
- [Let's Talk Of Interesting People](#), The Australian Women's Weekly, 26 August 1933

## Records

For more information and to access your records, follow the links below:

### Records held by other organisations

- [Records of Dalwood Children's Home \(c. 1966 - 1989?\)](#)
- [Correspondence files, single number series with 'B' \[Child Endowment\] prefix \(1904 - 1974\)](#)  
Item B97 of the Child Endowment correspondence files relates to Dalwood Children's Home

You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/dalwood-childrens-home/>