

# Belhaven Home for Mothers and Babies

1942 – 1948

- Other Names:**
- Belhaven
  - Belhaven Welfare Centre
  - Belhaven Infants' Home
  - Belhaven and Hopewood Infants Homes

## Details

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Belhaven Home for Mothers and Babies, in Bellevue Hill, was a babies home developed by Sydney businessman LO Bailey in 1942 and run by the Youth Welfare Association. Approximately 200 unwed or widowed mothers gave birth at Belhaven or sought assistance there. Bailey also gathered babies from nearby maternity hospitals. In all, 86 babies remained in Bailey's care. Belhaven closed in 1948 and the remaining babies were taken to Hopewood at Bowral.

Belhaven was the first stage in an experiment Bailey conducted, using children gathered from birth, to 'scientifically' demonstrate the health benefits of his 'natural health' approach to diet and medicine. The second stage, from 1944, was Hopewood House.

Belhaven was set up during World War II in a rented mansion that served as the Divisional Headquarters of the Eastern Command of the Australian Army from 1940 to 1941. The house, on 'Millionaire's Mile', had magnificent views, parquet floors and a pipe organ, as well as a dairy and vegetable gardens. Bailey lived in the same suburb and took over the lease when the Army moved out.

Bailey promoted Belhaven as a charity and set up the Youth Welfare Association to run it. To promote the charity the children were described as orphans, unwanted, born to mothers who could not care for them. In reality, Bailey recruited women with unintended pregnancies, by placing advertisements in magazines and writing to doctors. Bailey also wrote to the Australian Army, which employed large numbers of women during World War II. With the number of soldiers stationed in Sydney, both Australian and American, there was a high rate of unplanned pregnancies and the Army was highly cooperative, even sending soldiers for working bees at Belhaven in 1944.

Bailey offered room and board to pregnant women, so long as the mother-to-be was willing to adopt his diet. Their babies were born at the Royal Hospital for Women or the Royal Hospital. Bailey also scouted for newborn babies, including from the Child Welfare Department.

A submission to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care was written by a woman who was taken into Belhaven in 1943, as a baby. She was born to a Tasmanian woman who found herself pregnant whilst serving in Sydney in the Army. The Army sent her to Belhaven, and ordered she return to duty nine days after the birth. When the mother was discharged, just three months later, she returned to Belhaven with her parents and asked for her baby, but was told she was already legally adopted. The 'baby', writing to the Senate Inquiry, believed, for the next 50 years, that her mother had not wanted her.

Some of the mothers who stayed at Belhaven kept their babies. Other babies were not selected by Bailey, because, Deborah Ambery writes, they did not fit his ideal profile, which was blonde-haired and blue-eyed. Bailey was very interested in the parentage of the babies, and said that most were the children of servicemen, and thus of good genetic stock, but he did take sick babies, so he could demonstrate how his dietary approach could produce good health.

In 1943 Bailey promoted Belhaven to the *Australian Women's Weekly* in a large photo article called 'A New Deal for These Babies'. The article said the home was 'unusual' but highlighted that Belhaven offered 'ideal conditions' for babies who had come into the world in difficult circumstances:

*"We aim to do everything for a child that a good father does for more fortunate children," says Mr L. O. Bailey ... "We plan to maintain and educate the children until they are 18 years of age, so that they can take their place in the world with as fine a start as any child of a happy secure marriage."*

This article also revealed that Bailey's thinking was a combination of White Australia policy, child welfare, and scientific experimentation:

*There are not many men who would willingly turn their own houses into a mothercraft centre, but Mr Bailey is so enthusiastic about the scheme that he takes it as a matter of course.  
"I and my co-directors feel that by helping these children we are helping Australia, too," he said.  
"We can't hope to hold Australia indefinitely if our population does not increase.  
"A home such as ours helps to reduce the infant death-rate. There are some mothers who are simply not in a position to give a child proper care.  
"As we gain experience we hope to reach useful conclusions about child welfare, compile statistics, and publish information."*

Bailey soon needed larger premises, so the YWAA purchased Hopewood House in 1944. Belhaven ran as a parallel organisation and appears to have remained open until at least August 1948, as Bailey advertised for staff until that time.

Jack Dunn Trop writes that Bailey was dissatisfied with Belhaven, as supervision from the Child Welfare Department meant he was less free to enforce his ideas than he was at Hopewood. He was required to employ qualified staff and the matrons had their own ideas and frequently overruled him. When Belhaven closed the babies were taken to Hopewood, but Bailey said he noticed a difference in the health of the two sets of children.

The New Zealand Club held a fundraiser at the Trocadero for 'Belhaven and Hopewood Babies Homes' and Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Soldiers on 2 October 1947 and in September 1948 a 'Belhaven and Hopewood Infants Homes Typist Quest Art Union' was held at the Trocadero, with the support of the Society for Crippled Children. These show Bailey's connections with charities, and the military.

## More info

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### Related Entries

#### Run by

- [Youth Welfare Association of Australia \(1942 - 1985\)](#)

#### Related Organisations

- [Hopewood \(1944 - 1970\)](#)

The babies who were handed over to the Youth Welfare Association to be raised at Belhaven were moved to

Hopewood as they grew older.

## Resources

- Ambery, Deborah, [\*A design for better living : the bio-politics of eugenics, diet and childhood in the Hopewood Experiment of L. O. Bailey\*](#), 2000
  - Ambery, Deborah, *The Hopewood experiment*, Journal of Australian Studies, 1998
  - Drain, Dorothy, [\*New Deal For These Babies ...\*](#), The Australian Women's Weekly, 16 October 1943
  - Youth Welfare Association of Australia, *Annual report [Youth Welfare Association of Australia]*, 1948 - 1984
  - Dizze, [\*Family reunion at Bowral\*](#), A Whale of a Time, 30 November 2011
  - Dizze, [\*"Hopewood Children" Family Bus Trip\*](#), A Whale of a Time, 19 July 2012
  - Peters, Janet, [\*Hopewood, the history makers\*](#), April 2022
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