

# Henry Bennett (1881 – 1953)

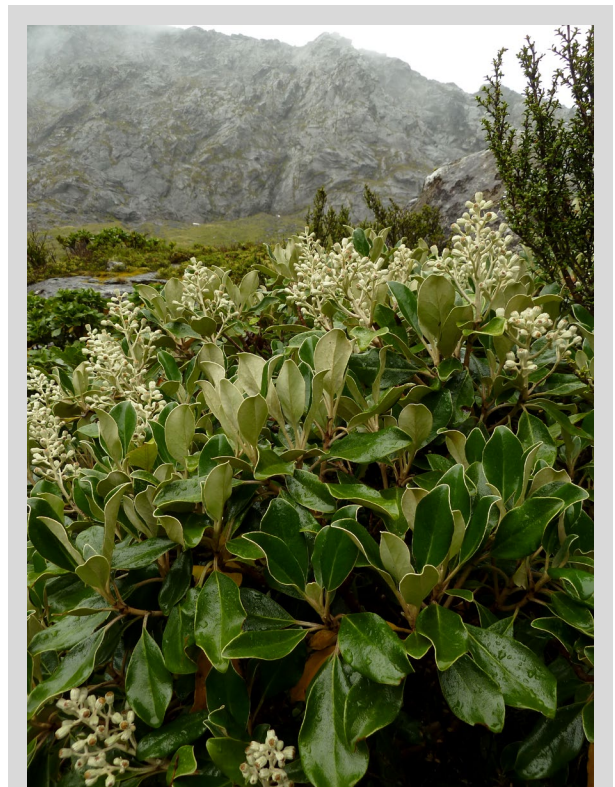
Henry Bennett was born in Dunedin on 6 March 1881. His father Henry Ogle Bennett from County Antrim, Ireland, trained in Ulster's leading plant nurseries and came to New Zealand when he was 21, arriving in Auckland in 1875. Disliking the climate, he headed south two years later and obtained work at Hopehill, the estate of James Allan after whom the nearby settlement of Allanton was named. There he met Lena King, also from Ireland, and in 1880 they married. At the time of their son's birth, Bennett was foreman at Gordon Brothers nursery in nearby North East Valley. After eight years with the firm he bought 1.2 hectares of partly cleared land at Upper Junction on the flank of Mt Cargill, and later added an adjacent section with a house, and there husband and wife built up their own nursery business, Broadacres.

An only child, young Henry (always known as Harry) attended North East Valley School until 1894 when, at the age of thirteen, he began his apprenticeship at Broadacres. By then, gooseberries and strawberries had been added to the list of exotic hedging and specimen trees grown from imported seed. In the late 1890s Harry imported 200 special strawberry plants from England, but found only one plant alive on arrival! It was nurtured, and from its 72 runners a stock of 5000 plants was built up and finally offered for sale in Dunedin.

On 10 June 1908 he married Jane Longworth (1884–1963) at St Martins, North East Valley, and in the ensuing eleven years their three sons and two daughters were born. The firm produced vegetables during World War I, supplying New Zealand soldiers in training at Trentham and Featherston military camps, and when the situation normalised, returned to growing general nursery stock. In 1925, on the death of his father, Henry took over Broadacres. He expanded the collection and propagation of New Zealand native trees and plants, especially celmisias, and in 1931 and 1932, with the help of his wife, sons and daughters, entered for the prestigious Loder Cup, which was at that time an annual award for the best collection of native plants and flowers exhibited at shows in New Zealand. Success on both occasions established Henry Bennett and Sons nationally. In 1932 land was bought at Waitati for roses, fruit trees and bulbs; the business flourished and in 1934 Henry Bennett was elected president of the New Zealand Horticultural Trades Association.

In 1942 botanists George Simpson and Jack Scott Thomson described *Senecio bennettii*, a shrub from the upper forest margins of Mt Cargill, naming it "in honour of Mr H. Bennett, of Broadacres, North-East Valley, Dunedin, who first drew our attention to its distinct characters". (The name is now a synonym of *Brachyglottis buchananii*.)

Henry Bennett died in the Dunedin Hospital on 23 September 1953 at the age of 72, remembered by those in the horticultural trade for his concise and impartial decisions, and by sportsmen for his skills in clay-bird shooting. In 1999, after more than one hundred years in business, the nursery was sold by the last surviving son, Tom.



## ***Brachyglottis buchananii***

*Brachyglottis buchananii* (previously *Senecio bennettii*) is distinguished as a South Island form of *Brachyglottis elaeagnifolia* (leatherwood). It is a stout spreading shrub up to 3 metres tall. The leaves are large and firm with well-marked veins. The flower heads on branching stems are numerous but not showy, as the yellow tubular florets have no spreading rays. A component of montane forest and shrubland, it is more common west of the Main Divide.