

XI. A TRIBUTE TO TED HENTY (1915–2002)

INTRODUCTION

Henty, Edward Ellis ('Ted') (Hamilton (Vict.), October 1915 — East Keilor, Australia, 23 February 2002)

Fl. Males. Bull. 18 (1963) 989; Fl. Males. I, 8 (1974) xliii, portr.

Ted Henty, a well-known botanist in Papua New Guinea died earlier this year. How much he was appreciated became evident when four of his friends submitted two obituaries. As the styles were so personal a responsible merger seemed unwanted, so both are presented below.

TED HENTY: THE QUIET ACHIEVER OF NEW GUINEA BOTANY

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Ted Henty, noted for his work in the Papua New Guinea National Herbarium (LAE), died aged 86 at East Keilor, near Melbourne on 23 February 2002 after an illness of 6–8 months. Those dealing with New Guinea plants will know of his extensive collections in the NGF and subsequent LAE series from all over the country. The new Composite genus *Piora* from the alpine grasslands on Mt Piora was just one discovery made in 1963 with S. Carlquist.

Those who knew Ted will consider him a fine field botanist, arguably one of the finest that has worked in Papua New Guinea. Not one to involve himself with revisionary studies, he was more concerned with the dissemination of floristic, practical and economic knowledge to the wider user (although with the intensive exploration of Papua New Guinea the opportunities were abundant, Ted never described a new taxon). [The only new combination I know of was made inadvertently: *Digitaria microbachne* Henrard var. *calliblepharata* (Henrard) Henrard ex Henty, Bot. Bull., Lae 1 (1969) 77. Ed.]

He preferred to call himself a 'didiman' (agronomist). He specialised in grasses and weeds, logical as his home life surrounded the farming of cattle and growing tropical fruit up the Markham Valley from Lae. Nevertheless, his knowledge of the broader flora of Papua New Guinea was vast.

Ted first went to Papua New Guinea in 1949⁴. He had joined the staff at LAE by 1957, soon deputising for John S. Womersley, an Assistant Director of Forests in his role as head of the National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens at Lae, and then for Michael Galore in 1976 soon after attainment of independence for Papua New Guinea when Womersley retired after almost 30 years as head. Michael Galore retired in 1983 and Ted

1) State Herbarium of South Australia, Adelaide.

2) Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney.

3) Australian National Herbarium, Canberra.

4) From Flora Malesian Bulletin Vol. 7, no. 29 (1976) 2572; Vol. 8, no. 36 (1983) 3876, 3908; Vol. 9/1, no. 37 (1984) 33; Vol. 9/4, no. 40 (1987) 378 and the publications cited with this article.

became Assistant Director at the time of a major crisis of loss of financial support and staff for the institution. This drew international expressions of support to the Prime Minister and his Ministers. Ted retired in late 1984 with the institution resourced though still inadequately. In November 1986 he moved to a property in north Queensland, before moving closer to his son in Melbourne late in his days when his health deteriorated.

Ted was a true gentleman in every sense of the word. He treated Papua New Guineans and expatriates honestly, fairly and with great compassion. He was a “wantok tru bilong olgeta”. Ted was unequalled in Barry’s experience as a non-indigenous speaker and writer of Melanesian pidgin. He combined these language skills with compassion to resolve some potentially very serious conflicts between the garden labourers and management at the Lae Botanic Gardens. These conflicts involved bows, arrows, axes and bush knives (modern managers have it easy!). Ted’s management style is best summarised by his response of “I don’t see why not” to most proposals – a contrast to the man he deputised for, but that is another story.

Ted was a great-grandson of Stephen Henty, one of Victoria’s famous Henty brothers who settled the Portland area early in the 1800s. His full name Edward Ellis Henty perpetuated that of his father who died in Anzac Cove, Gallipoli, on 7 August 1915. It was later in that year, in October, that Ted was born. A photograph of Ted aged 85 appeared with an article entitled “Father I never knew” in the Victorian newspaper Herald Sun Weekend¹.

Barry Conn and Bill Barker both first met Ted in August 1974 when taking up appointments as botanists at the Lae Herbarium. On Barry’s first day, after a brief introduction to the Herbarium and staff, Ted and he headed out for the day in the Sankwep logging area with about 30 students from the University of Technology. At the end of the dirt road Ted proceeded in his quiet voice to instruct these students in the art of tree identification. Shortly after beginning his lecture, a tropical downpour started with a vengeance. Unperturbed and apparently unaware of the drenching rain, Ted continued to instruct the students, who gathered closer to hear him over the noise of the rain and huddled over their notebooks in an effort to keep them dry. This scene remained unaltered for almost an hour until Ted finally suggested, as if he had just noticed, that they all could return to the safety of the bus. Thirty totally saturated students sat inside the bus, in pools of water for 15 more minutes while Ted completed his lecture.

With John Womersley away, Ted threw Bill in the deep end by sending him to the Talasea-Willaumez Peninsula area of New Britain with Artis Vinas for a fortnight’s botanising. Almost all conversations were in pidgin.

The ability to identify trees is an essential skill that all tropical field botanists must have. Particularly vital in the tropics is an ability to readily identify harmful plants. Ted was highly sensitive to species of *Semecarpus* (Anacardiaceae), requiring medical assistance whenever he was exposed to them. He advised Barry to avoid unnecessary contact with this genus. Who better to ask to learn how to identify them but Ted, Barry thought. Unfortunately, Ted would never take him closer than about 150 metres from the trees

1) By J. Hamilton; 21 April 2001, p. 9.

growing in the Lae botanical gardens. Barry never learned to recognize their diagnostic field characteristics. Consequently, because of Ted's lack of critical instruction, he too developed an ever-increasing sensitivity to these plants!

Ted had a dry sense of humour. Bill remembers being told that as a young Aussie Rules rover his method of contending with giant ruckmen at the bounces was to stand on their feet [This refers to an Australian game and its players. Ed.]. Ted also chuckled as he told him how he truncated one of his fingers while assembling a batch of LAE wood samples using an electrical planer at Lae Technical College. Concerned with stemming the excessive bleeding, he forgot to take the finger with him to hospital and lost all chance of a reunion with it when his assistant returned with the wood samples rather than the severed member. Jim Croft remembers how Ted thought he had been doubly hard done by as his fingers were already too short. He also remembers the humble side of his humour. Ted saw himself as hardly an expert in animal husbandry: his role was simply to ensure the grass was there – the cattle did the real work by grazing the stuff.

Each working day we were reminded of the gentleman in Ted with his ritual of driving Sue Osborn, the Secretary to the Assistant Director, in his little white Datsun sedan to the entrance of the herbarium. He would most genteelly offer his hand to assist her from the car, gather her baggage from the rear and take both his charge and her accoutrements through the front door and up the stairs to her office, before returning to take the car on to its park.

Tropical botany has lost a genial, generous and knowledgeable man.

[This appeared previously in the *Austral. Syst. Bot. Soc. Newsl.* 110 (2001) 8–9].

REMEMBERING TED HENTY

O.G. GIDEON¹

This is a tribute to one of the humblest and finest of colonial and post-independent botanists from whom I had the privilege of learning my botany.

The passing of Ted Henty in February of this year closed one chapter of the history of systematic botany in Papua New Guinea. I arrived in Lae in January of 1979 to commence duties as a Forest Officer, but unofficially as a trainee botanist (no such position existed in the then Office of Forests structure), after having gained a diploma in forestry from the Forestry School at Bulolo in November of the previous year. On arrival I was met by Michael Galore and Ted Henty, who gave me a rather brief introduction of what I was expected to do and who also introduced me to other staff. I could not hear nor understand most of what Ted said in that first encounter due to his accent and soft voice, but in time I was able to master not only hearing Ted's soft instructions, but also reading his comments scribbled in an almost indecipherable script between the lines of my papers.

1) University of Papua New Guinea, Boroko.

Ted Henty was affectionately known as 'Ted' by his expatriate and national colleague botanists, but to the national technical and clerical staff who adored and respected him, he was always called 'Mr. Henty'. Not that he demanded to be addressed as such; this was the normal form of address for all European men in pre-independent Papua New Guinea, but I have no doubt that many Papua New Guineans would be happy to continue to address him this way even today were he still around. I also began calling him 'Mr. Henty' until one day he called me aside and told me in his usual soft voice to drop the 'Mr. Henty' business and just call him 'Ted'.

Ted came to Papua New Guinea in 1949, and after a short stint as a Livestock Officer with the Department of Agriculture, he bought a few hectares of land outside Lae and attempted to grow cocoa. A few years later a tragic fire completely burned down his house, and from then until his departure from PNG in November 1987 he lived under a 'hybrid' grass and corrugated iron semi-permanent house. In 1957 Ted joined the staff of the famous Lae Herbarium (now the Papua New Guinea National Herbarium) of the Division of Botany, Department of Forests, starting as a Laboratory Assistant.

The Man

Baker, Conn & Croft, above, gave an accurate description of Ted's personal character: "Ted was a true gentleman in every sense of the word. He treated Papua New Guineans and expatriates honestly, fairly and with great compassion". My own experiences while working and learning botany under Ted bore this assessment out.



Ted Henty. Photograph by O.G. Gideon

Ted was a very humble and generous man, and would never ask anyone to do anything that he himself would not do. I never had the privilege of doing fieldwork with him, as he had somewhat retired from field duties when I joined the Lae Herbarium, but other Papua New Guineans who had worked with Ted, like Paul Katik and Yakas Lelean, enjoyed retelling how Ted was always happy to do his share of work, from carrying cargo to cutting a tree with an axe or washing dishes in the creek. Ted must have really enjoyed collecting plants in the bush, judging by the large number of collections he made under the NGF and LAE number series and also the number of expeditions in which he participated, and these were not without anecdotal tales. Paul Katik told me this story over tea a few years ago: During a botanical collecting trip in the Sagarai Valley in Milne Bay, Ted got lost in the bush. When Paul returned to the camp he waited until it started to get dark, he became quite concerned and started yelling and calling his name. By about 7 pm there was still no sign of him and he was now really

worried, and he started banging the buttress flanges of a Taun tree (*Pometia pinnata*) with an axe. Ted was able to pick up this echoing sound some kilometres away and made his way back to the camp in the dark following the 'jungle call', arriving there about 9 pm to a waiting hot cup of tea.

Ted was a very private person, and consequently most of the staff knew very little of his private life and his family. We do, however, know that a son who lives in Melbourne survives him. Ted also has an adopted daughter from Morobe Province, whom he never forgot. Even when he retired to Australia, he would arrange for her to spend a few weeks at a time with him at Tully.

Ted retired at the end of 1984, after 27 years of a very productive botanical career. Shortly after retiring he sold his land to the Pelgen family of Lae and moved to a small property near Tully in North Queensland, where he continued his love of growing tropical fruit trees. At Tully he had very few visitors, and I was one of the few who came by every time I passed through Cairns. When my wife and I drove up to see him for the last time at Tully on 15 April 1998, his cats dashed into the bush, probably not having seen another human apart from Ted for a long time. At that time he was then in the process of selling the farm so that he could move south to Melbourne to be closer to his son.

His Botany

When Ted started work a national forest inventory program was also beginning and he was able to join an active team of botanical collectors that went all over Papua New Guinea collecting botanical specimens, focusing mainly on timber trees, but also anything else that was in flower or fruit. This active collecting program extended from the late 1950s to early 1970s resulted in a rapid expansion of the collections of the Lae Herbarium. This period of active collecting helped him gain a good knowledge of the flora, which became quite useful in later years when he was responsible for guiding a number of young expatriate and later national botanists to become competent field botanists.

Ted Henty personally avoided revisionary or monographic studies, but focused his attention on applied botany, particularly the dissemination of botanical knowledge to a wider audience. This did not mean that he was not interested or did not see the value of these studies his colleagues were pursuing, and he encouraged and supported these wherever he could.

One of his first self-appointed tasks when he joined the Lae Herbarium was to try to understand the grasses, a challenge he first faced while working in the Pasture Branch of the Victorian Agriculture Department. In his own words: "I found the grasses interesting, but confusing, so I began putting the grass manual together in self defence". He was able to put to good use his early language training, as he was fortunate to have taken Latin and German in High School. Early New Guinea botanical literature exists mostly in German, and Ted's German training therefore was extremely useful. He began translating generic descriptions from 'Pflanzenreich' and some descriptions of indigenous species from Schumann and Lauterbach's 'Die Flora der Deutschen Schutzgebiete in der Sudsee'. The 'Manual of the grasses of New Guinea' was completed and published in 1969, a publication described by J.F. Veldkamp as one of the best grass manuals ever written considering the lack of literature and material.

After the publication of the 'Manual of the grasses of New Guinea', Ted turned his attention to weeds and poisonous plants. This was prompted by the fact that the agricultural sector was expanding rapidly throughout Papua New Guinea, particularly in the Highlands, and there was also a noticeable rise in the number of cases of suspected plant poisonings of humans and livestock. Ted began to put together information on the weedy plants and their control, and first published the 'Weeds of coffee in the Central Highlands' in 1970. This was followed in 1973 by 'Weeds of New Guinea and their Control', which was co-authored with G.H. Pritchard. In 1980 he published the important work on the poisonous plants, 'Harmful Plants in Papua New Guinea'.

His last effort in disseminating floristic knowledge was the monumental task of translating P. Gerhard Peekel's 12-volume manuscript 'Flora of the Bismarck Archipelago for Naturalists' from German to English. This work was not merely a simple translation, as it required a great deal checking and verifying of plant names using modern family treatment. Although far from being a complete flora of the region, it does indeed meet the authors desire for such a book to serve as a guide to the flora of the region. Because the publication covers mostly common lowland plants, and there is no completed flora of Papua New Guinea, it fills an important gap as a guide to the flora of Papua New Guinea. I have always recommended this book to anyone wanting to study the flora of Papua New Guinea.

Ted was eventually appointed to a contract Botanist Grade 1 position, and in 1962 he was promoted to be the Keeper of the Herbarium, the third most senior position in the Lae Herbarium hierarchy, after the Chief (later Assistant Director) and the Senior Botanist. Thus began one of his long-term roles—deputizing for the Assistant Director, firstly for John Womersley until his retirement in 1975, and later for Michael Galore, the first national Assistant Director. When Michael Galore accepted voluntary retrenchment in 1983, Ted Henty was confirmed as Assistant Director until his own retirement at the end of 1984. In 1983 the government failed to vote funds for the Division of Botany, but Ted with help from Michael Galore and Jim Croft admirably steered the Division back to calmer waters by soliciting support from colleagues overseas, who were able to convince the Prime Minister and Minister for Primary Industries to reverse their earlier decision to close the Division.

Ted had a vision for the Lae Herbarium to be staffed entirely by Papua New Guinean botanists at least by the end of the 1980s, and the Lae Herbarium was to recruit nationals with either a general biology or a forestry degree and train them to become competent botanists. Aside from Karl Kerenga who had a biology degree, he had to content himself with Kipiro Damas and myself, both of us having attained only a diploma in forestry. Realising the urgency of the situation he sent Damas and me back to school in 1980, only a year after our recruitment. This of course happened without the approval of the Public Service, but Ted and Michael Galore were prepared to infringe Public Service regulations for a good course. According to the Public Service regulations we had to serve a minimum of three years before we could take up further studies. I received my first degree (BSc Forestry) in 1983 from the Papua New Guinea University of Technology and went on to complete a Masters degree from the same university. Kipiro Damas received his first degree several years later, after deferring studies for some years to raise a family.

In 1981 Ted developed a program for the trainee botanists, that included each of us producing a family treatment for the 'Handbooks of the Flora of Papua New Guinea'. Kerenga and I completed our revisions of Onagraceae and Portulacaceae respectively in 1982, but for various reasons Volume III of the Flora Handbooks did not get published until 1995. After completing the Portulacaceae revision Ted handed me a 'little' Rubiaceae problem that needed sorting out, which involved reviewing the status of *Borreria* and *Spermacoce* and assigning the New Guinea species to the appropriate genus. But when I started looking deeper I opened up a can of worms. Ted later regretted assigning such a task to a novice. Where he could not help me he would direct me to seek help from others overseas, and with Ted's help I published my first scientific paper¹ in 1983, the same year I received my first degree. During the early stages of our training Ted attempted to convert me to agricultural botany, but soon gave up when he realised I was more interested in the plants of the forests than the weeds or poisonous plants.

I do not wish to make this tribute an avenue to publicise my own achievements, but all my achievements to date as the only Papua New Guinean plant taxonomist with a PhD I owe it to two people, Ted Henty for guiding and encouraging my first steps on the path of plant taxonomy and Robert (Bob) Johns for realising my potential and encouraging me to continue my education. When I started my PhD under Betsy Jackes at James Cook University, Ted must have been quite proud and excited, because he enjoyed introducing me to his friends and neighbours as I was going to be the first Papua New Guinean PhD in plant taxonomy. However, he never at any time hinted any credit to himself for initially setting me off on this course, that is the nature of Ted's humility and selflessness.

Ted enjoyed making others happy, and he would go out of his way to make anyone feel appreciated. When I started my first major revision (of the Papuanian *Mussaenda*) I got my girlfriend (now my wife) to help with card indexes of the species and specimens during her holidays from college. When Ted noticed her coming into the herbarium with me everyday, he decided to engage her as a part-time research assistant for me. I felt that this was his way of encouraging me to pursue this study with even more determination.

His eponymy includes a number of New Guinea plants, but one that stands out in my mind is a handsome palm endemic to New Britain, *Drymophloeus hentyi*, which is now to be found growing in several tropical botanic gardens and in hot houses in temperate gardens.

While Ted has left us for eternity his legacy will live on in Papua New Guinea, particularly within the botanical and agricultural fraternities. His 'Weeds of New Guinea' manual has been reprinted several times and is used as a textbook by all the agricultural schools in Papua New Guinea. His other manuals are also more widely used than all the botanical publications written on New Guinea plants.

On behalf of all Papua New Guineans, particularly those who worked with you, Ted, I salute you for your contribution to systematic botany in Papua New Guinea. In your humble and unselfish manner, you have planted the seeds for Papua New Guinea's first generation of professional botanists. TENKYU TUMAS (thank you very much).

1) Gideon, O.G. 1983. A new name in Spermacoce for two species of *Borreria* from New Guinea. J. Arnold Arb. 64: 627–628.

Major publications

- Henty, E.E. 1969. A manual of the grasses of New Guinea. Dept. For. Bot. Bull. 1: 214 + 1 pp.
- Henty, E.E. 1970. Weeds of coffee in the Central Highlands. Bot. Bull. (Div. of Bot., Lae) 4: 22 pp.
- Henty, E.E. & G.H. Pritchard. 1973. Weeds of New Guinea and their control. Bot. Bull. (Div. Bot., Lae) 7: 195 pp.
- Henty, E.E. & G.H. Pritchard. 1975. Weeds of New Guinea and their control. Bot. Bull. (Div. Bot., Lae) 7 (ed. 2): 180 pp.
- Henty, E.E. 1978. Polygonaceae. In J.S. Womersley (Ed.). Flora of Papua New Guinea 1: 222–248. Melbourne Univ. Press, Carlton.
- Henty, E.E. 1980. Harmful plants in Papua New Guinea. Bot. Bull. (Div. Bot., Lae) 12: 2: 153 pp.
- Henty, E.E. (Ed.) 1981. Handbooks of the Flora of Papua New Guinea 2: 276 pp. Melbourne Univ. Press, Carlton.
- Henty, E.E. (Translator). 1984. Flora of the Bismarck Archipelago for naturalists by P.G. Peekel: 638 pp. Division of Botany, Lae.

Eponymy

- Cinnamomum hentyi* Kosterm. (Lauraceae)
- Croton hentyi* Airy Shaw (Euphorbiaceae)
- Desmodium hentyi* B. Verdc. (Leguminosae)
- Digitaria hentyi* Veldk. (Gramineae)
- Dimorphanthera tedentii* P.F. Stevens (Ericaceae)
- Dryophloeus hentyi* (Essig) Zona (Palmae)
- Poa hentyi* Veldk. (Gramineae)
- Psychotria hentyi* Sohmer (Rubiaceae)
- Ptychosperma hentyi* Essig (Palmae)
- Steghanthera hentyi* Philipson (Monimiaceae)