

NICHOLAS DELANEY (c.1778 – 1834)
Irish Rebel, Convict, Superintendent of Roads

Nicholas Delaney was born in Ballyellis, Parish of Carnew, near the border of Wexford and Wicklow, Ireland.

We know from records relating to that time, that Catholics such as Nicholas were not allowed to live in the town itself. He would have lived on the outskirts of town, in a simple hovel with a dirt floor and mud walls. Court records tell us that Nicholas was an illiterate farm labourer, and it is thought that he lived in Ballyellis with his mother.

In 1798, Government Troops descended on Carnew. They inflicted terrible violence on those who opposed the British Government. Catholics and Protestants united in a now famous rebellion against these Troops. This was the Irish Rebellion of 1798.

One Bridget Dolan, accused Nicholas of being in a small party which captured two yeomen, and of killing one of them. At his trial, Nicholas was convicted and issued with the death sentence. Bridget was later proved to be a paid informer. Nicholas' sentence was changed to '7 years in the colonies'. Nicholas spent time in Wicklow Gaol before being transported. His name is listed as one of the 'prominent rebels' in the Wicklow Gaol historical brochure.

Irish political prisoners were treated a little more leniently than other convicts. When Nicholas arrived at Sydney Cove in 1802, he was a young man, a farm labourer, accustomed to hard work. This was in his favour. He was assigned to Major Johnston of the NSW Corps for 6 years. As he was a convict, we have good records of his movements.

In 1808, Nicholas married Elizabeth Bayly, a woman who came free to the colony. They married in the Church of England, as Catholic ceremonies were forbidden at that time.

In 1810 Nicholas was issued with picks and shovels from the government store. He was in charge of a convict gang, constructing culverts to divert water and improve drain lines in the Government Domain. It is recorded that he received horned cattle in reward for this successful project.

In 1813, Nicholas was granted an absolute pardon by Governor Macquarie.

By 1815, Nicholas and Elizabeth had four children, having lost their first born in infancy. Nicholas was granted 40 rods of land at O'Connell St, Sydney. This was on the condition that within three years he construct a dwelling of at least 36ft by 14ft.

Nicholas continued his work as a convict gang overseer at the Government Domain. He was held in favour by Governor and Mrs Macquarie, building roads, culverts and bridges which can still be seen today. As Governor Macquarie wrote in his diary on 13 June 1816, "*This day at 1pm, Nicholas Delaney, the overseer of the working gang employed for some time in the Government Domain, reported to me that Mrs Macquarie's new road - measuring three miles and 377 yards – was completely finished agreeably to the plan laid down originally for construction by Mrs Macquarie...*" The date was not chosen at random. It just happened to

be Mrs Macquarie's birthday! Nicholas and his convict gang of ten men, were rewarded with five gallons of rum from the government store. This date marks the foundation of the Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens.

Nicholas and his road gang next began clearing Macquarie Place, and erected a stone obelisk marking the distance to Parramatta.

On 23 Sep 1818, Nicholas was appointed Superintendent of Roads. He was given 36 Govt men (convicts) to complete and repair the Great Western Road from Parramatta to Emu Ford on the Nepean River. As a sideline, Nicholas was also earning Govt funds by supplying firewood to the Police Watch house.

In 1820, Nicholas and Charles Whalan, who he met while working at the Domain, were granted a temporary lease to run horned cattle at Evans Crown near the Cox's River. (Years later, eldest son John bought property near Hartley).

1821 was a busy year for Nicholas. He sold the property at 2 O'Connell St, Sydney for 500 pounds. A great deal of money in those days. He had made many improvements to the property, including home and outbuildings. It's position also made it prime real estate.

Nicholas obtained a Publican's Licence, and ran a pub at Evan – the Emu Ferry Inn. He successfully bid for and operated a ferry service across the Nepean River at Evan.

He also had a property at Evan, running horned cattle. He employed several convicts to run his property, and his name appears on several petitions of these convicts, giving personal references for their pardons.

In Dec 1821, Sir Thomas Brisbane replaced Governor Macquarie. In 1822, with no explanation given, Nicholas was replaced as Superintendent of Roads on the Great Western Rd.

In 1823, Nicholas was granted temporary leases to run sheep at Emu Plains and Appin, west and south of Sydney. These were not renewed 5 years later, as Govt land was starting to be sold rather than leased. Times were changing.

The 1828 Census lists Nicholas as Publican at Evans. He also has 80 acres, and is running horned cattle. Later that year a flood ruined his property, and washed his ferry downstream. It also took out the badly built pub. Nicholas suffered a broken thigh, and was no longer able to work.

Nicholas was in poverty. He and Elizabeth had nine children. Their eldest son John was only 17. They petitioned for two of their youngest to be placed in an orphanage as they could not support them.

On Sep 3 1834, Nicholas was drinking at the pub with a number of men. One of these men walked part way home with him. He attacked, killed and robbed Nicholas.

Nicholas Delaney is buried at Sir John Jamison's Catholic Cemetery Regentville. He has a large sandstone gravestone, not far from the top fence line, in the now urban outskirts of Penrith.

I am proud to call Nicholas Delaney my 3 x great grandfather.

Maureen Joyce
Member # 1853



Mrs Macquarie's Chair, Sydney