



## PRESS STATEMENT BY THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF NOTTINGHAM

### **Bishop Robert Willson's Body to return from Nottingham to Tasmania**

**The mortal remains of Bishop Robert Willson, a Catholic priest in Nottingham who went on to become the first Bishop of Hobart, in Tasmania, Australia, are being transferred from St Barnabas' Cathedral in Nottingham to St Mary's Cathedral in Hobart**

Bishop Willson was born in Lincoln in 1794; baptised an Anglican, he later became a Catholic and, after Ordination, built St Peter's Church, the first purpose-built Catholic church in Nottingham since the Reformation, which opened in 1828. He had a particular interest in helping prisoners and those with mental illness. In 1844, he was appointed first Bishop of Hobart, in Tasmania, Australia, where he was particularly noted for his work for the welfare of convicts. Ill health led him to return to England, where he died in Nottingham in 1866. His mortal remains were interred in the crypt of St Barnabas' Cathedral, mother church of the Catholic Diocese of Nottingham.

Eleven years ago Archbishop Adrian Doyle of Hobart, began correspondence with Rt Rev Malcolm McMahon OP, then Bishop of Nottingham, concerning the repatriation to Hobart of Bishop Willson's mortal remains. After consulting the Cathedral Chapter, Bishop Malcolm approved in principle this transfer and the eventual interment of the remains in the crypt of St Mary's Cathedral, Hobart, the building which Bishop Willson began in 1860.

The repatriation did not happen, and in 2016, the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Bishop Willson's death, Archbishop Julian Porteous of Hobart wrote to Rt Rev Patrick McKinney, Bishop of Nottingham, to ask if he would reconfirm Bishop Malcolm's approval. He gave his permission and, with the approval of the Ministry of Justice, the exhumation of his mortal remains will take place today.

Commenting on the exhumation, Bishop McKinney said:

While, as a Diocese, we will miss having his remains in the crypt of our Cathedral, it was Bishop Willson's documented intention to return to Tasmania, Australia. This was frustrated by his suffering a severe stroke during his last trip back to England in 1865 and his death a year later in Nottingham. The Archdiocese of Hobart will cover all the costs involved in the exhumation and transfer to Australia.

Canon Geoffrey Hunton, Cathedral Dean and Canon Anthony Dolan who, with his counterpart in Hobart, has overseen the investigations in the Cathedral crypt to locate Bishop Willson's burial site, will be present at the exhumation, which is being carried out by A W Lymn The Family Funeral

Service.

For further media information, please contact Canon Geoffrey Hunton on 0115 953 9839.

Father Andrew Cole  
Diocesan Communications Officer

14<sup>th</sup> February 2017

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