

Robert Stafford and his Gravestone

Every church-yard has its interesting stones. My favourite is the coffin shaped memorial to Robert Stafford, situated to the right of the drive near the Old Vicarage.

The inscription

*Here lyeth
The body of Robert
Stafford who was bur
ied here March ye 20th
An^o 1702 aged 78*

Surgite Mortui

Photo



The Latin *Surgite mortui* means *Arise ye dead*. This is the only Latin in the whole churchyard and suggests that Robert was an educated man. There are also two carvings: one is a skull and crossbones - reflecting mortality and the transient nature of life on earth, the other is more intricate including a snake and an hourglass with the same message. Both are well preserved indicating high quality materials and workmanship.

Parish records show that Robert and his father before him were both born in Baslow and that the family originally came from Darley Dale. Apparently he had no children: he died at Parkgate.

I have now discovered that he was the sub-accountant at Chatsworth from 1668 to 1689, responsible for managing all income and paying local bills before forwarding any balance to the main accountant at Hardwick, which was then the main Derbyshire residence of the Cavendish family. This was a busy time at Chatsworth. William Cavendish became the fourth Earl in 1684 and started a fundamental reorganisation of the gardens at Chatsworth. Accounts show that he spent £4325 in 1686, a vast sum representing millions today. Later, mainly after Robert's time, the house was rebuilt costing up to £2,500 a year for six years. Accounting was of course a clerk's job, but even so it was a very responsible one.

Robert Stafford came from a well to do Baslow family of the yeoman class. He was educated maybe at the Charity School at Stanton Ford before going on to university at Oxford or Cambridge. Later he joined the household of the third Earl of Devonshire rising to the trusted post of sub-accountant. His status is reflected in the memorial in the churchyard.

It is a Scheduled Monument ref 1334714. Details of all the buildings listed by Historic England can be found at <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list>

Their description of the monument is –

*PARISH OF BASLOW & BUBNELL CHURCH LANE SK 27 SE 3/20 (South Side)
Monument 10m South East of St Anne's Church GV II Monument to Robert Stafford in the form of a Coffin. 1702. Gritstone ashlar chest in the form of a coffin with relief carving on the top of an hourglass, a serpent eating its tail, crossbones and wings. At the foot a skull and crossbones in relief and at the ends stone lifting rings carved in relief. The coffin sits on a rectangular chamfered based. Inscription on the top appears to read, Here lyeth the body of Robert Stafford who was buried here March ye 20th Anno 1702 aged 78. Surgite Mortui*

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