



NUGGET

John Theophilus Desaguliers

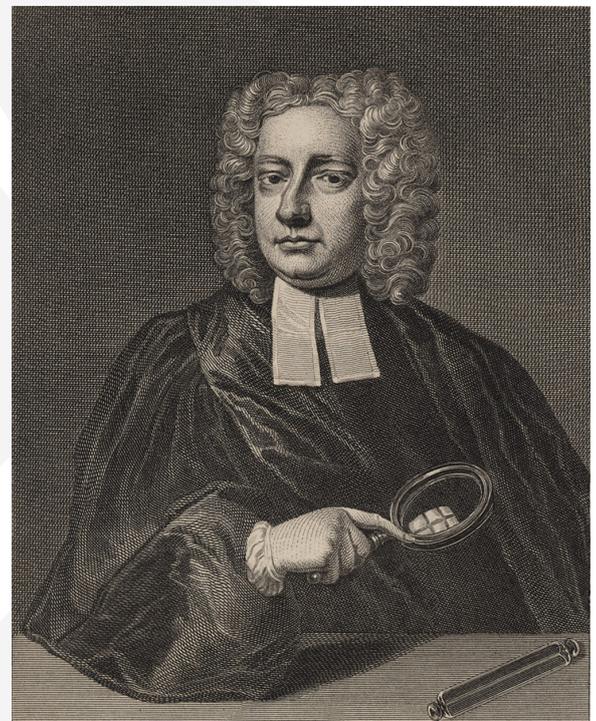
Summary: A biography of the Reverend John Theophilus Desaguliers a very influential Freemason.

John Theophilus Desaguliers is described by the historian Dr Albert G. Mackey as: *'the Father of Modern Speculative Freemasonry, and to whom, perhaps, more than any other person, is the present Grand Lodge of England indebted for its existence'*.¹

He was born in La Rochelle in France on 12th March 1683, but following a brutal anti-Protestant purge, his Father, a Huguenot pastor, was expelled from France together with his wife and two-year old son. John later attended Bishop Veasey's Grammar School in Sutton Coldfield and went on to read Theology at Christ Church College, Oxford. On graduating, he was ordained as an Anglican Priest, and took up a post as Lecturer in 'Experimental Philosophy' in London. A prolific author, he published papers throughout his life, mainly on scientific subjects and was elected as Fellow of the Royal Society in 1714.

Desaguliers' name does not feature in any of the records of the four Lodges that formed the first English Grand Lodge in 1717, but he is listed in the Revd Dr James Anderson's the *'The Constitutions of the Free-Masons: Containing the History, Charges, Regulations, etc, of that most Ancient and Right Worshipful Fraternity'* of 1723, as the third Grand Master, serving in 1719. Not surprising, given that he was instrumental in its conception, wrote its preface, and as Deputy Grand Master, signed the minutes of the meeting that approved its publication.

He had a strong belief that to attract the 'creative leadership', and to give it a national authority, it had to be led by a prominent member of the nobility He subsequently persuaded a whole series of noblemen to accept the role of Grand Master, starting with the 2nd Duke of Montagu in 1721. With a nobleman as Grand Master, and with much work still to be completed, Desaguliers acted as an influential Deputy Grand Master (equivalent to the Pro Grand Master today) in 1722, 1723 and 1725. In his lifetime, the hostility between Catholics and Protestants and between Jews and Muslims, made him question institutional religion's role as 'God's chosen



John Theophilus Desaguliers (1683–1744),
after Hans Hysing



instrument', and he inevitably leaned towards Deism (belief in a God but not in his supernatural activities on Earth). It may have been these Deist views which prompted his early steps to remove the overt Christian references from the operatives' catechism. He also influenced the Grand Lodge's decision to adopt a system of two separate and distinct Degrees; which did not sit well with many Lodges. By 1753, this unhappy band of Brothers grouped together to set up the 'Antient' Grand Lodge, as a rival to the 'London' or 'Modern' Grand Lodge. However, in the end, with the formation of the United Grand Lodge of England, in 1813, the Antients conceded on almost all these points, and Desaguliers' formidable achievements remained substantially unchanged. He did not live to see it, having died in London on 29th February 1744, and was buried in the Queen's Chapel of the Savoy. As Grand Master, Desaguliers introduced the pattern of formal Toasts we use today. So at your next Festive Board, it might be a kindly act to raise a glass to him in quiet appreciation.

References

1. Mackey, A.G.,(1894), *An Encyclopædia of Freemasonry and its Kindred Sciences*, p. 216, L.H. Everts & Co., Philadelphia.
2. Harper, Paul, Famous Freemasons - A Prologue, <https://solomon.ugle.org.uk/mod/resource/view.php?id=2084>



Recommended use of Nuggets

Nuggets offer a short, simple and readily absorbed means of progressing Masonic knowledge and an easy way to introduce learning to Lodges and Chapters. It is hoped that they will become a regular feature of Lodge and Chapter meetings as well as a source for private-study.

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Read by either a new or an experienced Mason with the minimum of preparation and practice; though ideally, they need to be read a few times beforehand.

Themed with the meeting or activity.

Used to initiate a discussion within a Lodge/Chapter, LOI/COI, or group.

Read at home and shared as a topic for a future discussion.

Used as a focus for an unplanned, informal discussion.

*Note: All biblical passages are taken from the Authorized King James version unless otherwise specified.

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