

**THE ORIGIN OF
FREEMASONRY: THE
1717 THEORY EXPLODED**

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The Origin of Freemasonry: The 1717 Theory Exploded by Chalmers I. Paton

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BY
BROTHER CHALMERS I⁰ PATON,
AUTHOR OF "FREEMASONRY IN RELATION TO CIVIL AUTHORITY AND THE FAMILY CIRCLE"
AND "FREEMASONRY AND ITS JURISPRUDENCE."

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PREFACE.

MANY worthy brethren have been offended on account of the discredit done to the Masonic Order by the assertion, which is now often and confidently made, that the whole system of Freemasonry is of very recent origin—some saying that it was invented by Elias Ashmole and a few of his learned and ingenious friends in the seventeenth century,—others, more numerous, that it derives existence from the year 1717, and was devised, promulgated, and palmed upon the world by Dr Desaguliers, Dr Anderson, and others, who then founded the Grand Lodge of England. Some of these brethren have asked me, as a brother believed to take a deep interest in every question of this kind, and supposed to have opportunity for investigation, to bestow a little attention upon this subject—to inquire what grounds there are for the Ashmole theory, and what for the 1717 theory—or if they are not both utterly groundless. I have gladly endeavoured to comply with their request, and hope the result may be satisfactory to them. Whatever

they or others may think of my pamphlet, I feel convinced that the proof which it sets forth is sufficient, and the argument conclusive, and this is all—or almost all—that I care for in the matter. I have a strong desire to see the honour of our Order maintained, and to contribute my own part in every way possible to the maintaining of it; and I believe nothing can be more contrary to it than the supposition that Freemasonry is of recent origin. For, if it were so, it would be liable to be regarded not merely as an invention of men of talent, which might be good, but, of necessity, as an imposture, which in no case can be imagined to be good. When we consider how Freemasonry was presented to public notice in England, after the foundation of the Grand Lodge in 1717, we must feel ourselves constrained either to acknowledge that Dr Desaguliers, Dr Anderson, and their coadjutors, were honest men doing a work which they believed to be good, or to set them down as a set of the most consummate rascals that ever imposed upon mankind, and yet with no motive for their imposture. No motive has ever been assigned or suggested. The case is one which needs to be plainly stated, and which the supporters of the 1717 theory must meet in the plainest statement of it. To maintain the honour or excellence of Freemasonry, and at the same time to maintain its base origin, is ridiculous. Looking to the characters of Dr. Desaguliers and Dr.

Anderson, it seems impossible to doubt their thorough honesty and integrity. This of itself is a powerful argument ; but another equally powerful is to be found in the character of the system which they did so much to promote in England and in the world—a system of high and pure morality. But I must not further anticipate, in the preface, the argument of the pamphlet itself, which I now respectfully commend to the attention of the members of the Masonic brotherhood.