The Amazing Life of Chevaliere D'Éon
Charlotte Geneviève Louise Augusta Andréa Timothée D'Éon de Beaumont was born in Tonnerre, France on the 5th October 1728.

She was raised as an orthodox Roman Catholic and explored ideas of being transgender from an early age through her religion - she was fascinated by transgender saints who had lived in monasteries and convents as their true gender and were discovered to be trans after their death and then canonised as saints.
She began practising with weapons and horse riding in 1745 graduated in 1749 excelling at civic and canon law.

around this time she began to question her gender - with all the men in her family dead she could have the possibility of living as a woman, perhaps in safety in a convent.
Having excelled at school, and written numerous books regarding topics of interest to the French state, she was recruited to the Secret du Roi - The King's secret service - as a spy, in 1756. The French King at this time was Louis XV (15th).

Dispatched to Russia

D'Éon was sent to Russia in 1756 and there are two accounts of how this happened.
the Chevalier D'Eon is a woman.

LA CHEVALIERE D'EON
DE BEAUMONT

LA CHEVALIERE D'EON
D'Éon was dispatched to Russia as the secretary of the ambassador to Russia, Chevalier Douglas. There are accounts of this happening as well.

D'Éon's mission was to influence Empress Elizabeth to improve relations between France & Russia to seat a king sympathetic to France on the throne of Poland. D'Éon herself alludes to both versions of events happening. Perhaps this is because both did happen in their own ways but also perhaps because she was a spy and more than one account kept people guessing.
D'Éon was dispatched to Russia to work as the Empress Elizabeth's lady in waiting. Elizabeth was known for regularly holding balls where people who attended dressed as the opposite gender. To get closer to the Empress, D'Éon would have most certainly attended.
Elizabeth was known for regularly holding “Metamorphosis Balls” where attendees were expected to present as a different gender and D’Éon would most certainly have attended these balls in order to get closer to Empress Elizabeth. The tradition of these balls was carried on by Catherine The Great!
METAMORPHOSIS

Ball
1761 saw her on the front line of the Seven Years War as a captain of a squadron of dragoons. She was wounded in action. The following year D’Éon was dispatched to England to smooth relations over with the English and negotiate a peace which resulted in The Treaty of Paris being signed between England and France in February 1763.

She was awarded the Order of Saint-Louis & the title of Chevalier (Knight). She was 35.
Meeting Queen Charlotte

When D’Éon was sent to England in 1762 it seems that part of her secret mission was to influence Queen Charlotte, the Queen-Consort of George III. There were rumours that D’Éon was having an affair with Queen Charlotte. There is little evidence of this, but D’Éon was never one to squash rumours as they often helped serve a purpose for her.
Time as Ambassador in England

While in England she was appointed temporary French ambassador to keep the peace, but her secret mission was to pass intelligence to the French state for an invasion of Britain.

During this time we can imagine she might have had some contact with underground drag and cross-dressing balls or even molly houses - although D'Eon is thought to be asexual so the latter may be less likely.

She was fired after 6 months for insubordination after disliking who was chosen to permanently succeed her in the role and was ordered to return to France to face trial and imprisonment, but being part of the Secret du Roi, D'Eon had access to a great number of French state secrets and she threatened to leak them if the King did not pardon her.
DM me for STATE SECRETS
Louis XV did not believe her and so called her bluff... She was not bluffing... This move made her very unpopular in France but won great favour with the English.

In 1766 Louis XV offered her an annual ‘pension’ of 12,000 Livres (£900) on the condition she release no more state secrets and continue to spy for France as and when necessary - terms which D’Éon gladly accepted. She went on to continue to live in England for the next decade, but now however was able to live openly as a woman.

This started rumours about her ‘true sex’. D’Éon did nothing to dissuade these rumours as they clearly allowed her to keep the air of mystery about her that she so needed being a spy. On 21 May 1771 Leeds Intelligencer (The Yorkshire Post) published that she was a woman.
After, who, in her father's lifetime, married contrary to the wishes of her family; a step which the incensed parent never forgave, and he died without leaving her a shilling, though her circumstances were not a little embarrassed. The generous youth, her brother, however, on succeeding to the estate, sent for her in the most affectionate manner, and putting notes to the amount of 30,000l. into her hands, declaring he was too unhappy in the loss of a father, to be deprived of so valuable a relation as his sister.

It is now certainly known that the person who had long been received in England under the name of the Chevalier D'Eon is a woman.
With Louis XV’s death in 1774 the Secret du Roi was abolished and D’Éon was able to negotiate her return to France with Louis XVI, supported by numerous influential friends. The result was a 20-page treaty that involved her handing over all the remaining state secrets she held.

Another part was that D’Éon be allowed to continue living her life as a woman. There are several different versions of how this happened.

1. D’Éon stoked rumours she had been born a cis female, forced to live as a boy, then a man so that she would be able to inherit her father’s estate, and that she wished to return to living as her birth gender.

2. D’Éon was upfront about being transgender and as part of the treaty demanded that she be able to live as a woman.

3. The French state & court were confused by D’Éon and said she must pick a gender and live as that for the rest of her life.
Dióon began preparing for her relocation to France. It's at this time she had the sword made - as a parting gift to her friend, the poet George Keate. He also owned and perhaps commissioned a painting of Dióon in her 25th year.

We loved, and were loved in return.

...and it nearly made me cry. This is our history.

On the inscription She shaved she asked to be referred to in French as a woman.

The Sword

We have always been here...
The sword was presented to George Keate in 1777 by Chevaliere d'Éon. It is a smallsword that has a boat-shaped copper alloy hilt with an older, straight double-edged blade made by Lourenço de Carvalho.

The blade has a gilded inscription that says “GIVEN BY THE KNIGHTESS D’ÉON TO HER FORMER FRIEND GEO: KEATE ESQUIRE. 1777”

The sword and its scabbard were purchased by the Royal Armouries, in Leeds, in 1980 and it is still on display there today!
Royal Armouries Museum

LEEDS
Now open
bit.ly/3SOFeLS


The Leeds museum has recently allowed the public back onto the site. The museum houses more than 8,500 objects across its five galleries. A few highlights from this expansive collection include a telescope made for Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington, which Wellesley used at the Battle of Waterloo; an Italian 17th-century ‘Amalricus’ crossbow, which earned its nickname due to its diminutive size made it perfect for hiding inside clothing; a mace from a longbow bow made on the Mary Rose; and a ‘vampire killing kit’ full of 19th-century items including stakes, a crucifix and garlic paste.

The museum will be open from 10am–5pm from Wednesday to Sunday. A free ticket must be booked in advance. The Tournament Gallery, and floor 3 and 5 of the War Gallery are currently closed to prepare for new exhibitions, but the cafe, shop and tablets are open.

“I am not a construct.

“These tragedies are delivered to us as universal stories, as stories of humanity. My perspective, my humanity, is not included in this universality. This is what I wanted to dismantle.”
one hears
the Royal
Armouries
is tip-top!
Return to France

By 1777 she was an “Honourable prisoner of war” at the palace of Versailles in the court of King Louis XVI. She was 49 years old and was expected to now be a lady of the court.

Queen Marie Antoinette turned out to be rather a big supporter of Chevaliere D'Éon, pushing her husband to order a new wardrobe for her by the Queen’s designer - Rose Bertin - with a grant for new dresses and makeup to abide by court standards.

In 1778 she asked to lead a squadron in the American War for Independence but was declined.
Return to England

In 1785

D’Éon grew restless and bored of her “sedentary lifestyle” and returned to England where she was welcomed with open arms. She often participated in fencing matches to demonstrate that at 57, in full petticoats & corset, she was still an accomplished swordmistress.

In 1789

the French Revolution began and she was forced to sell much of her property, including many of the dresses by Rose Bertin.

Her pension and grants ended with the deaths of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette.
She asked to lead a squadron of female soldiers against the Habsburgs in 1792 but was once again declined. This could have been due to her transness, advancing age or her former proximity to French royalty.

D’Eon quit fencing in 1796 due to a serious injury. By 1806, she had a fall and was left bedridden, being taken care of by the widow she lodged with, Ms Cole.
Chevaliere Charlotte D'Éon died 10pm 21st May 1810 in London, aged 81.

At the autopsy it was decreed that she had a “perfectly formed” penis and testicles, but that she also had “remarkably full breasts”. This tells us she was an intersex trans woman.

It is rumoured many were present at the autopsy including Queen Charlotte; there are reports that the Queen was so grief stricken at the death of her former lover that she had ordered the autopsy herself to understand the fate that had befallen her.

Not only was D'Éon subjected to the indignity of people crowding her apartments to view her body, her genitalia was drawn by Charles Turner and prints were made as proof of her “real sex”.
Chevaliere D'éon

What makes people uneasy is the sense that you've wandered off the path.

Kodwo Eshun

I will not be Defined

I will Be Me
Some theorise she is the inspiration behind Virginia Woolf's Orlando, after having been written about by her father Sir Leslie Stephen when editing the Dictionary of National Biography.

During her lifetime Mary Wollstonecraft was writing about her voicing her support and saying that Madame D'Éon was "a shining example of female fortitude to which British women might aspire."

Numerous films, tv shows, plays and operas have sought to depict D'Éon in various ways. 

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**WARFARE**

Bands of brothers - and sisters

**GENDER**

Crossing the boundaries of sex

* * *

**NEW**

depiction of her as an Amazon which she encouraged

*Now research seeks a more inclusive view*
Chevaliere d'Éon

spy
beauty
wit
mystery
traveller
diplomat

Swordswoman

Survivor
agent
author
cunning
loved
entertainer

unique?

A woman of many parts, of many places and of many times.
Thank yous

Royal Armories Museum
Ezekiel Foster-Eardley
Luna Morgana
Kit George Art
Dr Kit Heyam
Non-Binary Leeds
TransLeeds
Leeds 2023
National Lottery Heritage Fund
Brotherton Library, Leeds University
Duke University, North Carolina
The British Museum
The Wellcome Collection
National Portrait Gallery
British Newspaper Archive
Digital Transgender Archive
St. Pancras Old Church
Nina Möller - Epochs of Fashion
Ruth Pearce - Not Right
Mademoiselle de Beaumont, or the Chevalier d'Eon.

Female Minister Plenipo. Capt. of Dragoons &c. &c.
If you are 18+ and need trans support in Leeds then you can contact:

**Non-Binary Leeds**
NonBinaryLeeds@gmail.com
www.nonbinaryleeds.org.uk

**TransLeeds**
Contact@TransLeeds.lgbi
transleeds.org
Memorial monument for La Chevaliere D'Éon

Designed in 2022 by Luna Morgana