

53<sup>rd</sup> London International Antiquarian Book Fair at Olympia  
3 – 5 June 2010

# Media Alert

## CHEVALIER D'ÉON

### A Letter to Georgian London's most famous transvestite

26 May 2010



The Chevalier D'Éon, diplomat and transvestite, was one of Georgian London's most colourful figures. His early career in France was successful, and he was rewarded by the King for both his diplomatic and military successes. He had already experimented with cross-dressing as an aid to his diplomatic mission in Russia, and boasted that he had seduced Madame de Pompadour while attending a ball at Versailles dressed as a woman.

**MANUSCRIPT LETTER ADDRESSED TO HIM AS "MADEMOISELLE D'ÉON CHEVALIER DE L'ORDRE ROYAL ET MILITAIRE DE ST LOUIS", AT 37 BREWER STREET LONDON FROM HIS MOTHER FRANÇOISE.**

Tonnerre: 17 March, 1788

#### Description / Condition

Two pages (225 × 180 mm) on a single bifolium, verso with recipient's address stamp "Tonnerre" and red sealing wax, folded. Minor loss beside the seal, presumably torn on opening, touching one numeral of text only. Very slightly dusty.

After a diplomatic scandal in which he found himself caught between diplomatic factions in London, he found himself in exile in England, caught also in his own indecision over his gender. **He lived openly as a woman and was discussed wherever he went.** Bets on his sexuality were placed in London's coffee houses; though Boswell was in no doubt when he met 'Madame D'Éon' on 5 March 1786, noting 'she appeared to me a man in woman's clothes, like Hecate on the stage' (cited Rogister in Oxford DNB). As her fortunes waned, she was forced to give fencing displays (dressed as woman) to paying audiences.

Our letter is a fervent and maternal letter giving news from the family home in Tonnerre, an account of the contents of the Chevalier's cellars (he traded in wine while in London) and the state of his gardens, and wishing him a speedy return to his mother's side. Most intriguingly Madame D'Éon opens her letter with an extract from a complicated and beseeching letter written to her by her other daughter, Madame O'Gorman. This daughter had married an Irish cavalry officer Thomas O'Gorman and had promptly been disinherited by her parents.

The letter, written in advanced years, is almost certainly secretarial and signed very shakily.

The Chevalier died 21 May 1810, almost exactly 200 years ago, to the day.  
He is the subject of a new book *The Chevalier d'Eon and his Worlds: Gender, Politics and Espionage in the Eighteenth Century*, edited by Simon Burrow.

## Visitor Information

**Olympia Exhibition Centre, Olympia Two**  
Hammersmith Road, London W14 8 UX

[www.olympiabookfair.com](http://www.olympiabookfair.com)

**Advance Tickets free of charge for download from the website**

On the door: £10 single

### Opening Hours:

Thursday 3 June 4pm – 9pm

Friday 4 June 11am – 7pm

Saturday 5 June 11am – 5.30pm

## Press Information and Images

Go to [www.olympiabookfair.com](http://www.olympiabookfair.com) under **PRESS** for all press releases, news and high resolution images.

For more information and high res images please contact:

Angelika Elstner  
Marketing & PR Manager  
[angelika.elstner@gmail.com](mailto:angelika.elstner@gmail.com)  
+44 (0) 75 00 78 66 79

**Or contact the dealer directly:**

[justin@justincroft.com](mailto:justin@justincroft.com)  
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7 West Street  
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