

In 2011 Diss Museum commemorated the Manning family in a festival called Friends in High Places.

One of the sons, Thomas, was the first European to meet the Dalai Lama. The museum arranged for his great-great-nephew Robert to meet the current Dalai Lama.

Now a hoard of new material on Thomas Manning has been found and acquired by the Royal Asiatic Society at a cost of £98,000.

Diss Museum manager Basil Abbott was invited to go to London and inspect the collection.

Knowing that Manning had seen Thomas Paine, the subject of a previous museum festival, Mr. Abbott wanted to find any reference to this in letters.

Sure enough, he found a mention of the occasion in 1802.

Writing to his father from Paris, Manning said, "The only Great Man I have seen in private, at least that I consider as at all great, is Tom Paine! Him I consider as by no means occupying so high a situation in the Temple of Fame as he deserves and will, I think, attain. I only saw him for about 10 minutes at Mr. Holcroft's and consequently had no opportunity of hearing his conversation, which I understand from Mr. H is impregnated with the same masculine sense that so essentially distinguishes his writings. It was towards evening and I could scarcely distinguish his face. His manner and appearance is that of a Gentleman of the old school, which I did not expect. As he only called on Holcroft I was not introduced to him."

The host was playwright Thomas Holcroft who, like Paine, would probably have been hanged for sedition if he had stayed in England.

The archive fills 16 folders and includes a sketch Thomas Manning made of the boy Dalai Lama in 1811, with the pencil still tucked in the notebook.