

W&A £5m plea to save Wolsey's lost angels for the nation

By Anita Singh, Arts and Entertainment Editor

WHEN two weather-beaten statues were stolen from the gateposts of Wellingborough Golf Club, neither the owners nor the local police considered it much of a crime.

The carved angels were assumed to have been stolen by lead thieves, to be melted down for scrap.

The thieves left behind a matching pair, and that decision back in 1988 has turned out to be a lucky one for the club. Experts have identified the sculptures as bronze adornments made for the tomb of Cardinal Wolsey, lord chancellor to Henry VIII.

They were believed lost forever in the 17th century. Now reunited with the stolen pair – which found their way into the hands of a Parisian art dealer – they are the subject of a £5million bid by the V&A. The museum is starting a public fundraising appeal to meet half of the purchase price. The other £2.5million will be met by the National Heritage Memorial Fund and the Art Fund.

The campaign has the backing of Hilary Mantel, the author who documented

Wolsey's rise and fall in her Booker Prize-winning novel, *Wolf Hall*.

"A great Englishman we have forgotten may have his monument at last," she said. "To claim the angels for the nation would connect us to one of the liveliest eras of our history and one of its most remarkable men."

The angels were commissioned in 1524 from the Florentine sculptor Benedetto da Rovizzano as part of a magnificent tomb for Wolsey. But Wolsey fell out of favour with Henry VIII, and was buried without ceremony in 1530.

Henry appropriated the angels and other tomb carvings. They later passed to Elizabeth I, before being sold during the Civil War. At some point they found their way to Harrowden Hall in Northamptonshire, which was taken over by Wellingborough Golf Club in the Seventies.

The two stolen angels were sold by an unwitting Sotheby's in 1994, for £12,000. It was only when an academic who specialised in the work of Benedetto chanced upon the angels belonging to the Parisian dealer that the connection was made.



Paul Jesson, who plays Cardinal Wolsey in the stage adaptation of *Wolf Hall*, with the angels in the V&A

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