



The title page to *Ichthyographia* introduced the engravings for Francis Willughby, *De Historia Piscium*, ed John Ray (Oxford, 1686). It is addressed to Samuel Pepys, as President of the Royal Society, and the Fellows. Middleton Collection, Mi LP 53



A specimen of Spelt, a type of wheat, identified in the hands of both Ray (above) and Willughby (below). Middleton Collection, Mi LM 20, p.1242/1

Francis Willughby

A Natural Historian and his Collections

Collaboration

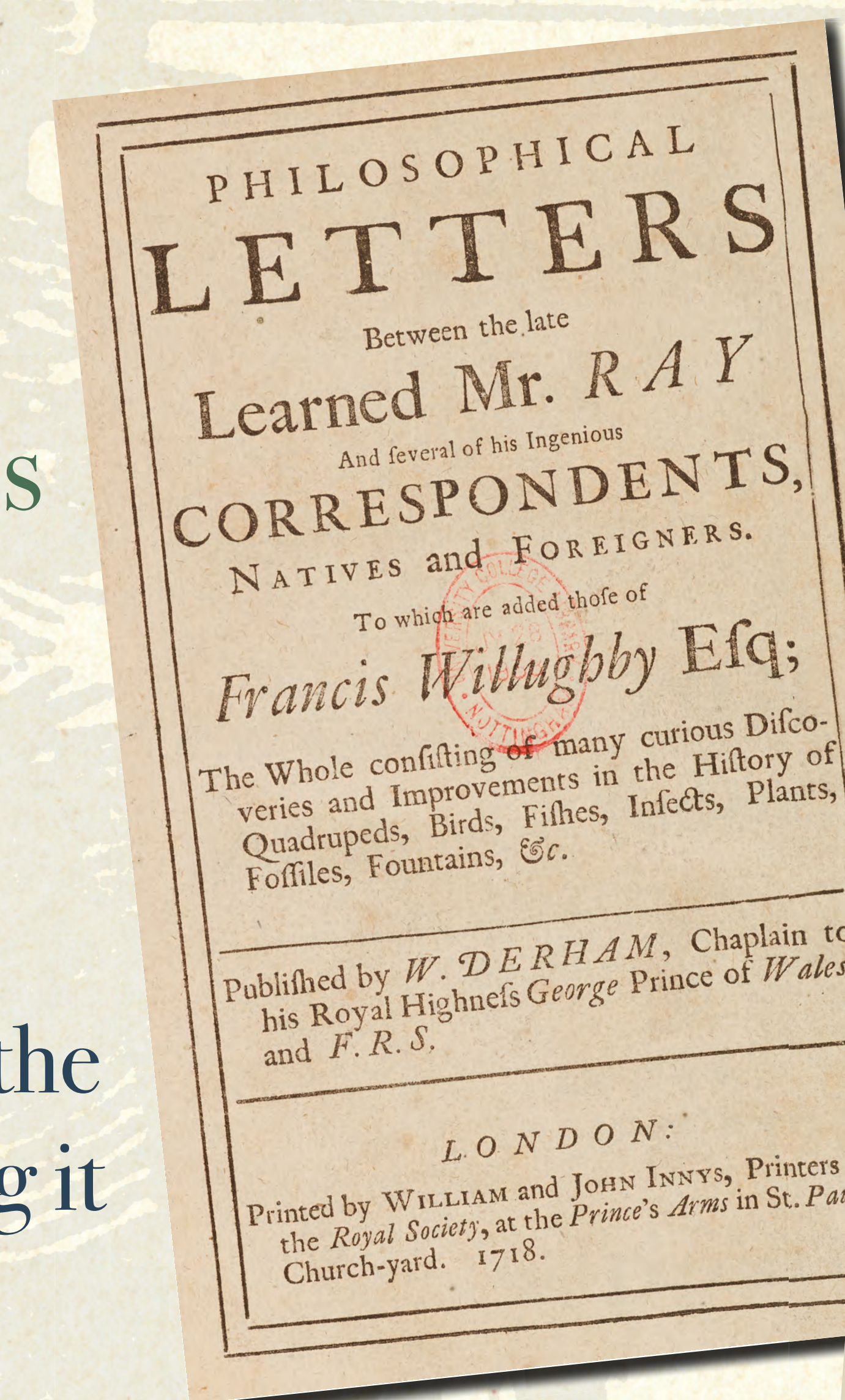
A thirst for new knowledge characterised the scientific world of Francis Willughby and other Fellows of the young Royal Society, who met to participate in experiments, speculate about reported discoveries and witness demonstrations of novel instruments, such as the microscope.

Willughby's first collaboration as a natural historian was in helping John Ray, his former tutor, to prepare his catalogue of Cambridgeshire plants. Ray, a Fellow of Trinity College Cambridge, became a friend. Both were men of strong religious faith and sought to understand the world as God's creation. Although botany was Ray's primary interest, and Willughby focused on birds, fishes and insects, they worked together in collecting and identifying specimens.

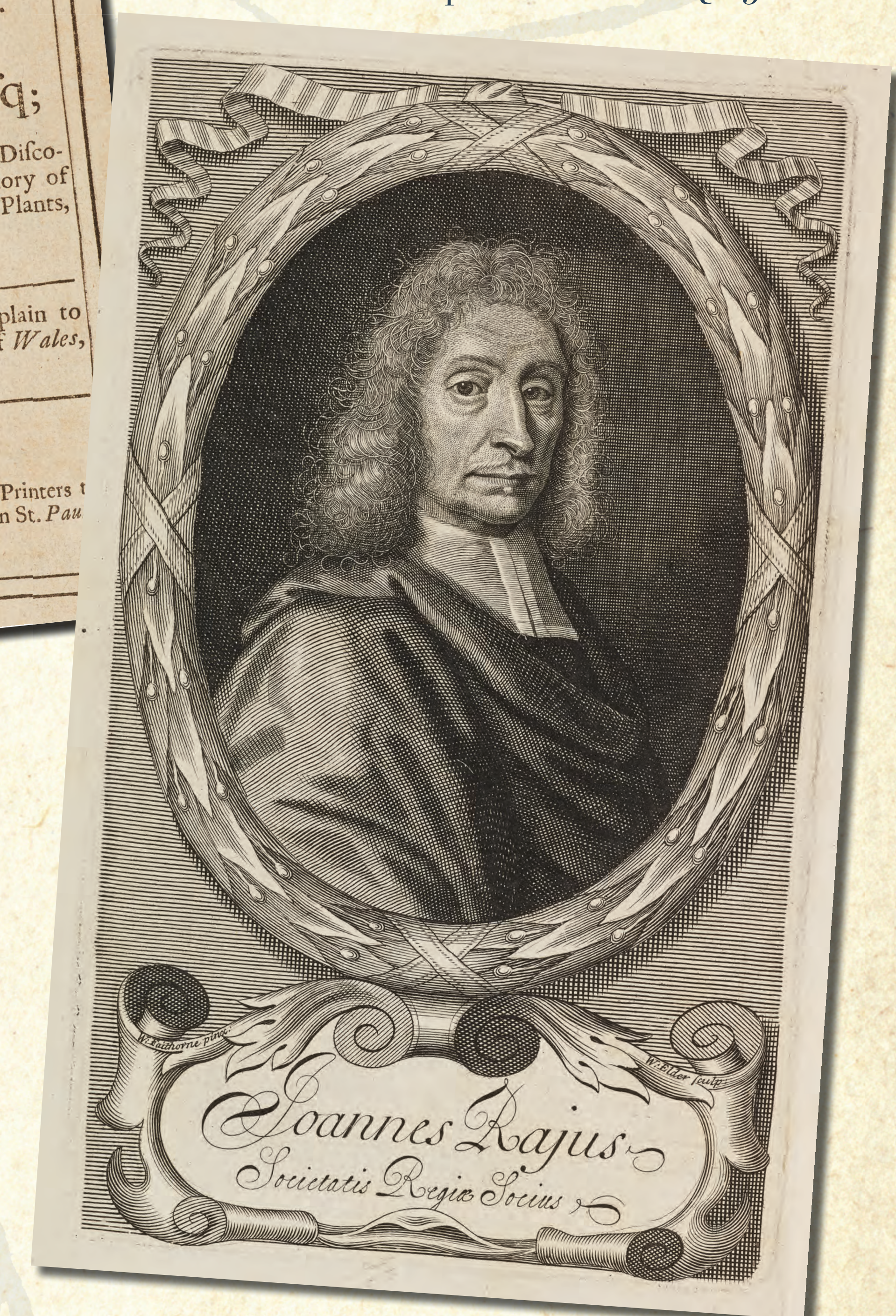
In 1662 Willughby invited Ray to join him at Middleton, to continue their joint research: "I am likely to spend much of my life afterwards in wandring or else in Private Studiing at Oxford, having but little heart to thinke of settling or ingaging in a family. I shall bee verie glad of your constant company and assistance in my studies..."

The personal nature of this passage led the editor of Ray's letters to omit it, crossing it out in red ink.

But family expectations could not be resisted. Willughby married Emma Barnard in 1667 and became increasingly involved in estate matters. Willughby's sudden death in 1672 left Ray with an annuity to support his independence and responsibilities to Willughby's young family as one of the executors of the will. On his deathbed, Willughby agreed that Ray could publish his papers. *The Ornithologia* (1676) was followed by the *Historia Piscium*, based on Willughby's notes on fishes. With 187 plates, the volume's huge expense (and poor sales) almost bankrupted the Royal Society, leaving it unable to finance the publication of Isaac Newton's *Principia* (1687).



John Ray (1627-1705) in later life, by William Faithorne, engraved by William Elder. From John Ray, *Synopsis methodica animalium quadrupedum et serpentini generis* (London, 1693), frontispiece.



Title page of *Philosophical letters between the late learned Mr Ray and several of his ingenious correspondents, natives and foreigners: to which are added those of Francis Willughby Esq* (London, 1718) Special Collection QH31.R2

Extract from the letter in which Francis Willughby invited John Ray to join him at Middleton. From MS 746/1

