



The impressive Willoughby monument in the parish church of St John the Baptist, Middleton is over 5m high. Three cartouches bear tributes to the family members. Photograph © Cameron Newham.



Sketches of bees and wasps attached to a single page. Middleton Collection, Mi LM 25/213

# Francis Willughby

A Natural Historian and his Collections

## Legacy

Sir Thomas Willoughby, the naturalist's second son, erected a magnificent marble memorial in Middleton Parish Church to commemorate the lives of his father and other family members. The Latin eulogy to Francis Willughby is often cited:

*"...He penetrated into the recesses of mathematical science to others inaccessible. He searched out the various secrets of medicine; he so nicely examined the whole system of philosophy, that he restored its peculiar qualities and names to every part; he gave also a new arrangement to natural philosophy..."*

From W Jardine, *Naturalists Library*, xvi, Edinburgh, 1843 Middleton Collection, Mi 4 LP 4

Willughby's death was widely regretted by contemporaries. The Royal Society was interested in his extensive collections but unable to secure them. Only one page of images records his particular passion, the world of insects. When Ray's work on insects was published, Willughby's name was not on the title page, although the text revealed his contribution. Willughby's reputation became gradually limited to the subjects of birds and fishes, thanks to the *Ornithology* and the *Historia Piscium*. Whether Willughby or Ray should have the credit for these works has long divided

opinion. Modern research emphasises the collaborative nature of their relationship and reveals the full breadth of Willughby's interests.

Willughby's contribution to taxonomy is celebrated in the the use of his name for three organisms; an insect, a plant and a fish. In 1802 a leafcutter bee was named *Megachile willughbiella*; in 1820 the genus *Willughbeia*, a Southeast Asian plant, was first described; and in 1862 a fish native to Lake Windermere was named *Salvelinus willughbii* ('Willughby's Charr').



Leafcutter Bee in flight. Willughby's early observations on the behaviour of leaf-cutting bees were communicated to the Royal Society. Photograph © Jeremy Early.

A detailed description and illustration of 'Willoughby's Char' [sic] appeared in Jonathan Crouch *A History of the Fishes of the British Isles* (London 1862-5), v, plate ccxxii.

