



Visitors to the church often ask about the stylishly painted IHS monogram on the right and the left of the end walls of the gallery. Bishop Street is not the only church in which you will find this monogram. Many denominations use it as symbolic decoration. It is found throughout the world.

A popular explanation of what it stands for, particularly in the nonconformist churches, is '*In His Service*'. The letters remind us of our calling to serve Christ to follow Him in all we do.

Originally, however, the monogram had a simpler meaning. It stood for the name of Jesus the Holy Name as it was traditionally called. This might seem odd, because only the S features in His name, but we should remember that the *New Testament* was written in Greek and Greeks used a different alphabet. The letters I and H are the nearest to the sounds of the Greek letters in the name Jesus. This is why the letters are sometimes called a 'christogram' an emblem based on the name of Christ. It is also probable that each letter stands for a word in the Latin sentence '*Jesus Hominum Salvator*' Jesus saviour of all people. This reminder of Christ's love for all no doubt appealed to the early Methodists with their emphasis on the universal love of God.

In fact, the letters of the Holy Name go back a long way before the birth of Methodism. The discovery of a gold coin stamped with IHS dates the monogram at least as far back as the 8th century, (the 700s). It was popular enough by 1274 to be given "official" recognition by Pope Gregory X. The Society of Jesus or Jesuits (a religious order founded in 1534) adopted the monogram and added three nails to symbolise the crucifixion.



The monogram is inseparable from a Christian devotion usually called the The Holy Name of Jesus. The background to this devotion is the essentially Biblical idea that to know a name is to be in touch with the real identity of the name's bearer. Thus to meditate on the name of Jesus is to come to know Christ.

The devotion to the Holy Name played a significant role in 14th century English mystical writing. Richard Rolle (c1300-1349), an author of spiritual tracts and poems who lived as a hermit wrote

‘if you think on the name of Jesus continually, and hold it firmly, it purges your sin and kindles your heart, it purifies your soul, it removes anger, it does away with spiritual lethargy, it wounds you in love, fulfils you in charity...’



Another 14th century mystic, Walter Hilton, wrote in his *Scale of Perfection* of those who have achieved peace of heart through prayer: ‘The thought of the Blessed Name of Jesus brings them comfort and joy, and meditation on it feeds their love for Him’.

In Italy St Bernardine of Siena (1380-1444) placed a cloth woven with the Holy Name on his pulpit and with stirring eloquence called upon his congregation to nourish their souls by meditating on the grace and power of the Name of Jesus. He is sometimes called ‘the Apostle of the Holy Name’. Pope Pius II said that people listened to him as they might have listened to St Paul. There is a picture by Sao di Pietro of Bernadine, old and frail, preaching in the great public square in Siena, his pulpit bearing the pulpit cloth marked with the Holy Name.

Devotion to the Holy Name has a place in Methodist spirituality through the hymns of Charles Wesley (1707-88). Drawing on passages in the *New Testament*, particularly ‘God ... gave him the name which is above every name’ (Philippians 2:9), Charles Wesley writes of Christ's grace, power and authority. One hymn begins with the confident assertion ‘Jesus the name high over all’ and goes on to speak in the second verse of:

Jesus the name to sinners dear,
The name to sinners given

The third verse of the ever popular ‘O for a thousand tongues to sing’ (at one time the first hymn in the Methodist hymn book) opens ‘Jesus the name that charms our fears’. The second verse of ‘O heavenly king look down from above’ starts ‘O God of all life, we hallow thy name’.

Acknowledging the Holy Name is a feature of English hymns. It is present in Edward Perronet's ‘All hail the power of Jesu's name’, Christina Rossetti's ‘None other Lamb, none other Name’ and most famous of all, John Newton's ‘How sweet the name of Jesus sounds’. That hymn ends with a lyrical expression of the emotional yet rational nature of devotion to the Holy Name:

And may the music of thy name
refresh my soul in death.