**THE ECONOMICS OF METHODISM IN THE LONG EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Paper by Clive Norris at the Economic History Society Annual Conference, 1 April 2017**

Early Methodist finance

The movement which coalesced around John Wesley from the late 1730s was primarily intended to spread the Gospel across the British Isles.[[2]](#footnote-2) Over the next few years three principal financial needs emerged. First, alongside a group of sympathetic Anglican clergymen, Wesley recruited a team of lay preachers, who visited the growing numbers of local religious societies.[[3]](#footnote-3) Second, while formally remaining within the established Church, his followers increasingly built chapels (known as preaching-houses). And third, Wesley published and distributed cheap books and pamphlets through his Book Room.

The first Methodist Conference, when Wesley and his associates planned the campaign, was in 1744.[[4]](#footnote-4) By this point there were regional headquarters in London, Bristol, and Newcastle-upon-Tyne, modelled on the residential Moravian communities which Wesley had visited in Germany.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Unlike the Church of England, the movement had no endowment or official support.[[6]](#footnote-6) Its sources of funds were various: most of the clergymen (including Wesley himself, an Oxford academic) had some regular income, which served as the movement’s startup finance; wealthy admirers helped, for example, by accommodating travelling preachers and sponsoring publications; and the local religious societies associated with Wesley’s mission raised modest membership dues, a practice probably originating in Bristol in 1742.[[7]](#footnote-7)

As Wesley’s ‘Connexion’ expanded it had to manage increasing flows of income and expenditure, a growing chapel estate, and the employment of staff. The financial collapse in 1753 of the Moravian movement in England, due largely to over-ambitious building projects funded by cheap credit, and entailing debts of an astonishing £132,000,[[8]](#footnote-8) shocked Wesley and other Methodist leaders, and their financial practice reflected a determination to avoid similar problems.[[9]](#footnote-9) Against this background, we will now consider how Wesleyans financed their core activities: preaching, chapels and publishing.

The economics of Wesleyan preaching c. 1770

By 1750, there were perhaps 14,000 people in local societies affiliated to Wesley’s Connexion, served by fifty preachers.[[10]](#footnote-10) Over the next twenty years it both expanded and became increasingly distinct from mainstream Anglicanism. A key development came in 1768, when the Conference banned preachers from pursuing secular trades.[[11]](#footnote-11) Many had worked part-time, for example as pedlars, but their reliance on debt finance, in an age when credit was usually informal and local, restricted their geographical mobility. Henceforward maintaining the preachers was the movement’s overwhelming financial priority, though the preachers also acted collectively by establishing a retirement fund in 1763, perhaps inspired by the Church of Scotland’s widows’ and orphans’ scheme of 1743.[[12]](#footnote-12)

By 1770 there were some 29,000 Wesleyan members in perhaps a thousand local societies, organised into sub-regional groupings known as preaching circuits. There were forty-nine of these in 1770, served by 150 preachers, typically stationed in circuits in teams of three.[[13]](#footnote-13)

The core funding for preaching came from membership dues: both a weekly ‘class subscription’ of one penny, and a quarterly subscription of one shilling, known as ‘ticket money’, though in practice the latter yielded only around half of the expected income. Weekly subscriptions covered local expenses such as hospitality for visiting preachers; ticket money was sent wholly or partially to the circuit, where it paid for the preachers’ stipends, their accommodation and other expenses.

So on average a circuit in 1770 comprised some six hundred members, contributing £130 a year in class subscriptions towards local expenses, and a further £60 towards circuit preaching costs, or around £20 per annum per preacher. In practice the situation was much more complex, but also highly flexible.

Most Wesleyan society members were of modest means: probably 60 per cent of the men were skilled industrial workers, with incomes of around £32 a year, who were thus contributing 1 per cent of their gross incomes to the cause.[[14]](#footnote-14) Payment especially of the weekly dues was an essential part of Methodist discipline, and non-payment could lead to expulsion.[[15]](#footnote-15) However, when times were hard, the wealthier members were expected to subsidise the poorer.

Fortunately there were other sources of income. Annual national collections were also introduced, notably the Yearly Collection towards general expenses, established in 1763,[[16]](#footnote-16) which funded grants from the centre to financially struggling societies and circuits; and the Kingswood Collection to support the Wesleyan boarding school and which later also financed educational allowances for preachers’ families, originating from 1756.[[17]](#footnote-17) In time, congregational collections drew in resources from the many non-members who attended chapel.[[18]](#footnote-18) And there were attempts to reduce expenditure. Some circuits, for example, sought to control it by paying their preachers a salary to cover all their costs, rather than the more typical £12 stipend plus expenses.[[19]](#footnote-19) Others relied more on part-time local preachers, who received expenses but no stipend.

Two factors put this system under severe strain. First, the growing numbers of full-time preachers who were married with children expected housing and food for their families, help with educational and medical costs, and a household servant. Second, preachers’ costs became increasingly monetised, for example as food and accommodation came to be paid for rather than provided gratis by members and supporters.[[20]](#footnote-20)

While the Methodist leadership reviewed the deployment of preachers annually and tried to keep the ratio at around 240 paying members per preacher, both total and per capita costs rose inexorably, as these estimates, based on a sample of local financial records, suggest:[[21]](#footnote-21)

**Table 1. The estimated costs of Wesleyan preaching, 1770-1800**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Year | No. members  | No. preachers | Members per preacher | Married preachers with children | Total costs | Costs per preacher | Costs per member |
| 1770 | 29,000 | 130 | 220 | 50 | £7,000 | £55 | 4s.10d. |
| 1780 | 44,000 | 180 | 240 | 70 | £12,000 | £70 | 5s.5d. |
| 1790 | 71,000 | 330 | 220 | 150 | £26,000 | £80 | 7s.4d. |
| 1800 | 110,000 | 420 | 260 | 200 | £42,000[[22]](#footnote-22) | £100 | 7s.8d. |

(By way of comparison, Adam Smith reported that in 1755 the ‘very poorly endowed’ Church of Scotland supported 944 ministers on revenues of some £68,500, or £73 per head).[[23]](#footnote-23) Various national strategies were used to spread these costs, including grants and controls on recruitment, but the issue remained troublesome throughout this period.

Chapel finance

Wesley and his colleagues faced intense hostility, including personal violence, on their travels, and this was a key reason why they soon began to build chapels. Financing chapels was problematic for a movement with a predominantly working-class membership and no government support: in contrast, the Church of England could levy charges on its parishioners, organise house to house collections, and sell annuities backed by legislation.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Wesley sought donations constantly, but he and other preachers came to guarantee a growing volume of debts which totalled £11,383 in 1766.[[25]](#footnote-25) An intensive fund-raising campaign quickly brought this down, and in future the annual Conference, supported by a group of leading businessmen called the London Committee, kept the chapel building programme under review, insisting for example that most of the funds needed were secured locally before work commenced.[[26]](#footnote-26) The Committee recognised that payment of attractive interest rates on chapel loans might be necessary, and 5 per cent – the maximum allowed under the usury legislation – was often paid. It became standard practice, as in the Church of England, to rent out seats in chapel, and this income was used to service the debt. The progressive introduction, from 1763, of a model chapel deed, offered cheap standardised documentation for new chapel projects, but on condition that only Wesleyan preachers had use of them.[[27]](#footnote-27) From this period a typical chapel funding package might look like this:[[28]](#footnote-28)

**Table 2. A typical chapel funding package, c.1780**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Size of society | 40 members |
| Size of chapel | 200 seats, accommodating members and ‘hearers’; of which* half ‘free’
* other 100 rented
 |
| Capital costs | £400; of which* half donated
* other £200 borrowed at 5 per cent [£10 interest annually]
 |
| Annual income from seat rents | * average rental 2s.0d.
* annual income £10
 |

This proved to be a robust model. The network expanded from some 150 chapels in 1770 to approaching 1,000 in 1800, and the availability of accommodation almost doubled. In the 1780s the Connexion had opened some 250 chapels, or 25 a year; in the following decade the rate was over 40, and in the 1800-1809 decade it exceeded 50.[[29]](#footnote-29) But this caused anxiety amongst the leadership, less over the aggregate volume of debt than over whether the income from seat rents would cover the interest.

There were constant efforts to find more resources, both capital and income. In the 1790s, perhaps as a result of a capital shortage arising from the war with France, some chapels looked to tontine finance; this was banned by Conference in 1800, concerned that the last surviving annuitant might become sole proprietor, thus jeopardising Conference control.[[30]](#footnote-30) However, in 1811 the London Methodist Chapel Amicable Society was launched, marketing tontines to fund chapel debt reduction and new construction;[[31]](#footnote-31) while in 1819 the trustees of Mansfield chapel bought eleven acres on Bradwell Moor for a commercial larch plantation, presumably in the search for income.[[32]](#footnote-32)

This table estimates expenditure on Wesleyan chapels in the later eighteenth century:

**Table 3. The estimated costs of Wesleyan chapels, 1770-1800**[[33]](#footnote-33)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Year | No. members | No. chapels | Members per chapel | Total chapel debt (1770 actual, others estimated) | Annual interest (estimated) | Interest per member |
| 1770 | 29,000 | 146 | 201 | £6,958 | £348 | 3d. |
| 1780 | 44,000 | 304 | 144 | £20,000 | £1,000 | 5d. |
| 1790 | 71,000 | 612 | 117 | £100,000 | £5,000 | 1s.5d. |
| 1800 | 110,000 | 958 | 115 | £180,000[[34]](#footnote-34) | £9,000 | 1s.8d. |

But the wealthier members and supporters of the Wesleyan Methodist movement continued to invest in chapels, securing good returns for themselves; the ‘middling sort’ rented seats, which serviced the debt; and the poorer Wesleyans gained free seating in chapel.[[35]](#footnote-35) In 1791 one critic claimed that the movement’s expense:

…falls almost intirely [*sic*] upon the labouring parts of the community, of which this body chiefly consists.[[36]](#footnote-36)

With respect to chapels, he (or she) was wrong.

The Book Room

Wesley published and distributed books and pamphlets on a large scale; perhaps five of his titles sold over 50,000 copies each.[[37]](#footnote-37) This effort was at first haphazard, but in 1753, probably in the light of the Moravian collapse, lay stewards were brought in to run the Book Room, and they did so on an increasingly commercial and profitable basis.[[38]](#footnote-38) Contemporary book production was inherently risky, especially because of the high cost of both paper and type, but also potentially lucrative, since production costs were only around 25 per cent of cover prices.[[39]](#footnote-39) While Wesley began in the mid 1730s by using the commercial book trade to print, publish and distribute his works, over the next three decades most aspects of the process were brought in-house; in particular, the growing cadre of preachers sold the publications on a commission basis, while chapels held the stock.

The Book Room helped the movement to manage with relatively few full-time and part-time preachers, by offering various publications which society leaders could use in conducting meetings, as Wesley explained to his societies in Bristol in 1764:

…do not encourage raw young men to exhort among you. It does little good to either you or them. Rather, in every Society, where you have not an experienced preacher, let one of the leaders read the *Notes* or the *Christian Library.*[[40]](#footnote-40)

By the 1790s annual profits averaged some £1,900.[[41]](#footnote-41) The first published accounts date from 1796 and suggest that in the previous year income totalled about £6,600 and costs £4,200, a rate of profit of some 36 per cent.[[42]](#footnote-42) While John Wesley lived this income was regarded as his to allocate, often for charitable purposes, but on his death in 1791 it became available for wider Connexional purposes, and this probably saved the movement from financial disaster.

Education, welfare, and missions

Though the core activities of Wesleyan Methodists were preaching, running chapels, and book distribution, there were many others. The Connexional boarding school at Kingswood near Bristol was the destination of choice for preachers’ sons.[[43]](#footnote-43) Individual Wesleyans and local societies were active in relieving poverty, and from 1780 a network of Stranger’s Friend Societies sprang up to help non-members for whom the parish relief system was inadequate.[[44]](#footnote-44) The movement also launched overseas missions.[[45]](#footnote-45)

These activities were financed by both members and sympathisers, in two main ways. Firstly, non-members typically outnumbered members by three to one in Wesleyan chapel congregations;[[46]](#footnote-46) and the movement came increasingly to rely on congregational collections to subsidise its work.[[47]](#footnote-47) And secondly, new ventures were often funded by the subscription model which had become ubiquitous as the means of financing public buildings and other services such as hospitals, libraries, market halls and assembly rooms. They included national subscription programmes for the free distribution of books (1782), for overseas missions (especially between 1787 and 1793), for the relief of poor Wesleyan preachers (from 1800), and for helping chapels in financial distress (from 1818). The funding sources for overseas missions were particularly diverse: for example, on the Caribbean island of Nevis the Wesleyan missionaries contracted with local slave-owners to provide fortnightly services on their estates, for an annual fee of £56.12s.0d.[[48]](#footnote-48)

This widening of the resource base is evident from the geographical distribution of the funds raised in Britain: while the areas of greatest Methodist membership strength were in Yorkshire and the South West of England, funding for these new ventures came primarily from the wealthier South East. London’s financial dominance is striking:

**Table 4. London’s contribution to selected Wesleyan fund-raising campaigns, 1782-1800**[[49]](#footnote-49)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Campaign | London membership as % national total | London’s % contribution to campaign |
| 1782 Society for Distributing Religious Tracts among the Poor | 6 | 45 |
| 1787-93 missions fund-raising by Thomas Coke | 4 | 41 |
| 1800 Preachers’ Friend Society | 3 | 75 |

Connexional policy and practice

This expansion of both income and expenditure led to the emergence of a corpus of financial regulations from the late 1760s. These were designed primarily to ensure that the cadre of professional preachers was supported, and indeed affordable; and similarly, that the chapel estate, which was the financial responsibility of local Wesleyans, did not expand beyond their capacity to raise and service debt. In this the Connexional leadership was broadly successful, at least until the early nineteenth century, but at the expense of increasing financial complexity, and frequent calls on the membership and the wider community of supporters for additional funds.

Discussions at the annual Conference in this period often reflect a tension between the desire of local societies to deploy more preachers and open more chapels, and the concern of the central leadership and their business advisers that the Connexion should not over-reach itself. Thus the 1783 Conference condemned the ‘needless multiplying of preaching-houses’ and restricted fund-raising to the circuit concerned.[[50]](#footnote-50) From 1800 there were annual financial reviews and repeated efforts to control expenditure on both preachers and chapels, including an 1813 rule that married preachers would only be sent to a locality if there were at least 450 members to support them.[[51]](#footnote-51)

The 1805 Conference had restated its confidence in the Connexion’s basic financial model, saying that it could:

…think of nothing equal to that original plan which Mr. Wesley established at the first institution of Methodism; - viz., that, upon an average, a penny a week should be advanced by every member in the Classes, and one shilling at each Quarterly Visitation. This, with the Yearly Collection, and the profits of the Book-Room, would we think, be sufficient to relieve us in our state of embarrassment.[[52]](#footnote-52)

They were probably right, as these estimates suggest:

**Table 5. Local Wesleyan Methodist finances 1799-1800**[[53]](#footnote-53)

|  |
| --- |
| *Core local income* |
| Class money | £20,000 |
| Ticket money | £11,000 |
| Chapel seat rents | £16,000 |
| Collections in chapel | £16,000 |
| Total | £63,000 |
| *Core local expenditure* |
| Preachers | £40,000 |
| Chapels | £25,000 |
| Total | £65,000[[54]](#footnote-54) |
| Estimated shortfall | £2,000 |

There were shortfalls in local fund-raising but these were routinely covered by subventions from the centre, in turn funded by a range of transactions between the various Connexional funds:

**Table 6. National Wesleyan Methodist finances 1799-1800**[[55]](#footnote-55)

|  |
| --- |
| *Core national income* |
| Yearly Collection | £2,200 |
| Kingswood Collection | £1,600 |
| Book Room profits | £1,800 |
| Extraordinary Collection | £1,200 |
| Total | £6,800 |
| *Core national expenditure* |
| Educational expenditure | £1,400 |
| Routine grants to circuits | £3,400 |
| Special grants eg. medical expenses | £900 |

But a price was paid for the movement’s financial resilience: increasing dependence on those with money and financial management skills.

Social composition of Wesleyan Methodist funding

Initially it had relied on the members’ mandatory weekly and quarterly contributions, but this model was transformed by the acquisition of chapels, funded by a combination of loans from wealthy members and supporters, and seat rents from the middle classes and the more prosperous artisans. And they also generated income from congregational collections, from members and non-members alike. None of these payments was linked intrinsically to personal religious discipline: the loans were commercial, the seat rents contractual, and the collections voluntary. Wesleyan Methodists became increasingly conscious that they were operating in a marketplace, in which some chapels and preachers flourished and others did not; the voice of the moneyed became more prominent; and the rigorous discipline of early Methodism was challenged by an increasingly voluntarist – if not consumerist - approach.

The movement’s core aims were both spiritual success and healthy finances, the latter often being seen as evidence of the former, as in this 1818 account of Wesleyan-Methodist Missionary Society meetings:

Our Meetings in London were never so good. We had large attendance, good speaking, good sermons, and, what some think as good as all the rest, a capital collection.[[56]](#footnote-56)

Conclusion

However, despite the increasing influence of its wealthier members, Wesleyan Methodism continued to attract and enthuse people in their thousands: between 1800 and 1820 membership in the British Isles almost doubled, from 109,911 to 215,017.[[57]](#footnote-57) One reason for this success – as Adam Smith noted in *The Wealth of Nations* - was the sophistication and adaptability of the movement’s finances.[[58]](#footnote-58) For example, the Book Room provided materials which allowed untrained lay people to lead meetings, thus reducing the demand for preachers, while generating substantial profits. But the central economic relationship was that which linked the deployment of preachers and the expanding chapel network in both law and practice, as this 1813 Conference appeal to chapel trustees succinctly explained:

It is by the preaching of the blessed gospel in the chapels, that the income of the seat-rents is created...[[59]](#footnote-59)

It was this key relationship which enabled John Wesley’s Methodism to meet the needs of Britain’s growing and geographically shifting population.

1. This paper draws on material in Norris, C. M. (2017). *The financing of John Wesley’s Methodism c.1740-1800*. Oxford, Oxford University Press [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For a wide-ranging and highly readable account of early Methodism see Heitzenrater, R. P. (1995). *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*. Nashville, TN, Abingdon Press [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. On Wesley’s early clerical supporters see Skevington Wood, A. (1992). *Brothers in Arms: John Wesley’s early clerical associates*. Nantwich, Wesley Historical Society Publishing Office (Alfred A. Taberer). The best overall account of his preachers is Lenton, J. H. (2009). *John Wesley’s preachers: a social and statistical analysis…* Colorado Springs, CO, Paternoster [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Heitzenrater, R. P. (gen. ed.). (2011). *Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley. Vol. 10: The Methodist Societies. The Minutes of Conference*. Rack, H. D. (ed.). Nashville, TN, Abingdon Press [henceforth *Works, Minutes*], 120-46 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. On Wesley’s visit to Germany see for example entries for 24 July and for August 1738 in Heitzenrater, R. P. (gen. ed.). (1988-2003). *Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*. Vols. 18-24. *Journal and Diaries*, I-VII. Ward. W. R. and R. P. Heitzenrater (eds). Nashville, TN, Abingdon Press [henceforth *Works, Journal*],Vol. I, 263-4, 266-97 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. On the Church of England see Best, G. F. A. (1964). *Temporal Pillars: Queen Anne's Bounty, the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, and the Church of England.* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press; Virgin, P. (1989). *The Church in an Age of Negligence.* Cambridge, James Clarke and Co.; Gibson, W. (2001). *The Church of England 1688-1832: unity and accord*. London, Routledge; and Jacob, W. M. (2007). *The Clerical Profession in the Long Eighteenth Century 1680-1840.* Oxford, Oxford University Press [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See entry for 15 February 1742 in *Works, Journal*,Vol. II, 251 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The Bank of England’s inflation calculator suggests that £1 in 1750 was worth £203.47 in 2016, putting the total Moravian debt at some £27 million – see [http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/education/Pages/resources/inflationtools/calculator/default.aspx#](http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/education/Pages/resources/inflationtools/calculator/default.aspx), accessed February 2017 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. On the Moravians’ financial problems see Ward, W. R., ‘Zinzendorf and Money’, in Sheils, W. J. and D. Wood. (1987). *The Church and Wealth*. Oxford, Basil Blackwell for the Ecclesiastical History Society. They led Methodists to rely more on financial planning than divine Providence [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Estimates by author [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *Works,* *Minutes,* 359, Q. 22 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *Works,* *Minutes,* Introduction,54-55, and 297. On the Church of Scotland scheme see Dunlop, A. I. (ed.). (1992). *The Scottish Ministers’ Widows’ Fund 1743-1993*. Edinburgh, Saint Andrew Press [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. *Works, Minutes*, 381-5 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. On the social composition of Wesleyan societies see Field, C. D. (1994), ‘The social composition of English Methodism to 1830: a membership analysis.’ *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library* 76 (1) (Spring 1994), 153-178. For estimates of income – though for contemporary England only - see Lindert, P. H. and J. G. Williamson (1982). ‘Revising England's Social Tables 1688-1812.’ *Explorations in Economic History* 19, 385-408, Table 3 at 396-397 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Thus in 1779 Wesley told Samuel Bradburn, the senior preacher in the Cork circuit: ‘....I understand there is one class (Brother Brewer’s) which contributes nothing weekly. If so, give no ticket either to him or any of them. They break a fundamental rule of the Society.’ Letter of 29 December 1779 from John Wesley to Samuel Bradburn. Telford, J. (ed.). (1931). *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* (8 Vols.) London, Epworth Press [henceforth *Telford, Letters*] Vol. VI, 366 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. *Works, Minutes*, 297 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. *Works, Minutes*, 277-8, and n.969 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. ‘In this city [ie. London] we have never done with collections, very seldom can a stranger attend our chapel but we are begging money of him.’ Letter of 25 February 1799 from John Pawson to Thomas Taylor. Bowmer, J. C., and J. A. Vickers (eds.). (1995). *The Letters of John Pawson: Methodist itinerant, 1762-1806*. (3 Vols.) Peterborough, World Methodist Historical Society, Vol. 2, 146 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. This was for example the practice in 1790s Dublin – see entries for 1790-1792 in University of Manchester, John Rylands University Library, Methodist Archives and Research Centre (henceforth *MARC*), AN1977/294: James Rogers (WM) (1749-1807) Diary and Notebooks (1784-1804): Item 4, account book (1784-1804) [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. An issue discussed, for example at the 1788 Conference – *Works, Minutes*, 665-6, Q.23 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Norris, C. M. (2017), *Financing*, 40, Table 2.1. (extract); 228, Table 10.2 (extract) [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Using the Bank of England’s inflation calculator, these costs are equivalent to some £3.2 million today [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Smith, A. (1954, first published 1776-78). *The Wealth of Nations*. London, J. M. Dent and Sons. 2 vols. Vol. 2, 295. One would expect the costs of Church of Scotland ministers to be higher because this was predominantly a settled rather than travelling ministry, and some 70 per cent of ministers were married – see (1743) *A Scheme for Providing an [sic] Yearly Annuity to Widows of Ministers of the Established Church of Scotland*. Edinburgh, Church of Scotland, 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. On the financing of Anglican church buildings see Friedman, T. (2011). *The Eighteenth-century Church in Britain*. New Haven, CT, and London, Yale University Press; Clarke, B. F. L. (1963). *The Building of the Eighteenth-century Church*. London, S.P.C.K.; and Chalklin, C. W. (1984). ‘The financing of church building in the provincial towns of eighteenth-century England’ in Clark, P. *The Transformation of English Provincial Towns 1600-1800*. London, Hutchinson, 284-310 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. As the Conference commented when reviewing the debt: ‘We shall be utterly ruined if we go on thus.’ *Works, Minutes*, 322, Qs.12-13 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. On the London Committee see *Works, Minutes*, Introduction, 44-46; and *MARC*, AN1977/514: Joseph Sutcliffe: (WM) (1762-1856) Ms. History of Methodism (1703-1824), 4 vols., Vol. II, 675-9 [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. ‘Large Minutes’ for 1763, *Works,* *Minutes*, 868-870 [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Based on calculations in Norris, C. M. (2017), *Financing*, 93-4 [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Estimated by author based on data in Myles, W. (1813)*, A Chronological History of the People Called Methodists*, Fourth ed. London, Methodist Conference Office, 427-445 [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. (1863) *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Vol. II, 1799-1807*. London, Wesleyan Conference Office [henceforth *Minutes II*] 57, Q.23, A.2: ‘Let no chapels be built on the Tontine plan; that is, when the persons concerned in building them design to make them their own property, and turn them to their temporal advantage.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. ‘Plan of the London Methodist Amicable Society, with the Benefit of Survivorship’. The plan was dated 1811, and published in the 1812 *Methodist Magazine*, Vol. 34, 71-72 [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. *Methodist Magazine*, Vol. 43 (1820), 303 [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Taken from Norris, C.M. (2017), *Financing*, 117, Table 5.1 [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Using the Bank of England’s inflation calculator, the equivalent of perhaps £14 million; annual interest would be around £700,000 [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. An interesting variation on Finke and Iannaccone’s supply-side approach to religious change: in the case of Wesleyan chapels, the demand for (secular) investment opportunities increased the supply of religious services (chapel premises). See Finke, R. and L. R. Iannaccone (1993). ‘Supply-Side Explanations for Religious Change’, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 527, Religion in the Nineties (May 1993), 27-39 [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. (1791). *A Review of the Polity, Doctrines and Morals of the Methodists*. London, Printed for J. Johnson, 44 [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Estimates by author, based on numbers of editions printed. These best-selling publications were the Charles Wesley sermon ‘Awake, thou that sleepest’ (1742); *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1753); *The Nature and Design of Christianity* (1740); *Hymns for the Nativity of Our Lord* (*174*4); and *The Nature, Design and General Rules of the United Societies* (1743) [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Entry for 8 February 1753, *Works, Journal III*, 445 [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. On eighteenth century book trade economics see for example Raven, J. (2007). *The Business of Books*, especially chapters 5, and 7-10; Cochrane, J. A. (1964), *Johnson's Printer*, 13-20; and Plant, M. (1974). *The English Book Trade: an economic history of the making and sale of books* [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Letter of October 1764 from John Wesley to the Societies at Bristol, *Telford IV*, 272. The references are to the Book Room publications *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (1755) and *A Christian Library* (1749-55). See also Tolar Burton, V. (2008). *Spiritual Literacy in John Wesley’s Methodism*. Waco, TX, Baylor University Press, 245 [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. *MARC*, Book Room: (WM) Archives (1791-1932), Ms. 691: Book Room Committee, Wesleyan Methodist Church, Minutes (1797-1808), summary financial report headed ‘Abstract’ [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Pawson, J. and A. Mather. (1796). *An Affectionate Address to the Members of the Methodist Societies…* London (?), Unknown publisher [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. For the history of Kingswood school see Ives, A. G. (1970). *Kingswood School in Wesley’s Day and Since.* London, Epworth Press; Hastling, A. H. L, W. Addington Willis and W. P. Workman (1989). *The History of Kingswood School by Three Old Boys.* London, Charles H. Kelly; and Best, G. M. (1998). *Continuity and change: history of Kingswood School 1748-1998.* Bath, Kingswood School. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Heitzenrater, R.P. (ed.). (2002). *The Poor and the People Called Methodists*. Nashville, TN, Kingswood Books. On the Stranger’s Friend Societies see Alexander-Macquiban, T. (2000). *British Methodism and the Poor: 1785-1840*. PhD, University of Birmingham [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. The official history of the Wesleyan missions is Findlay, G .G. and W. W. Holdsworth (1921). *The History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society. In five volumes*. For a more recent account see Pritchard, J. (2013). *Methodists and their Missionary Societies 1760-1800*. Farnham, Ashgate [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Field, C. D. (2012). 'Counting Religion in England and Wales: the long eighteenth century, c.1688-c.1840', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History,* 63 (4) (October 2012), pp. 693-720, at 705 [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. See f.n.18 above [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Watson, R. (1817). *A Defence of the Wesleyan Methodist Missions in the West Indies*. London, Blanshard and others, 126-127. Watson implies that this arrangement was not unique [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Calculations by author based respectively on data in (1783). *A State of the Society for Distributing Religious Tracts Among the Poor, for the Year 1782, with an Alphabetical List of the Subscribers*. London, Printed by John Paramore. I am grateful to Drew University Library for making a digital copy of this manuscript available to me; Coke, T. (1794). *A Statement of the Receipts and Disbursements for the Support of the Missions Established by the Methodist Society, for the instruction and conversion of the negroes in the West-Indies, addressed to the subscribers*. London, Publisher unknown; and (1801) ‘Report of the Committee of the Preachers’ Friend Society’ for 1800, *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, Vol. 24 (1801), 369 [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. *Works, Minutes*, Q.22, 541 [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. (1863) *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Vol. III, 1808-1813*. London, John Mason [henceforth *Minutes III*] 395 [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. *Minutes II*, 293 [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Estimates by author, based on selected eighteenth century Methodist primary sources [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. According to the Bank of England’s inflation calculator, perhaps £5 million in 2016 terms [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. *Minutes II*, 60-78 [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Letter of 11 May 1818 from Richard Watson to William Walton in Jackson, T. (1840) ed. *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Rev. Richard Watson*. London, John Mason, 276 [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. *Minutes II*, 53-4; (1864) *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Vol. V, 1819-1824*. London, Wesleyan Conference Office, 125 [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. ‘In England those arts [ie. of winning converts] have been long neglected by the well-endowed clergy of the established church, and are at present chiefly cultivated by the Dissenters and by the Methodists. The independent provisions, however, which in many places have been made for dissenting teachers by means of voluntary subscriptions, of trust rights, and other evasions of the law, seem very much to have abated the zeal and activity of those teachers. They have many of them become very learned, ingenious and respectable men; but they have in general ceased to be very popular preachers. The Methodists, without half the learning of the Dissenters, are much more in vogue.’ Smith, A. (1954, first published 1776-78). *The Wealth of Nations*, Vol.2, 271 [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. *Minutes III,* 394-395 [↑](#footnote-ref-59)