

Kininmonth, K. W. (2018) Clive Murray Norris, *The financing of John Wesley's Methodism c. 1740-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. xx+313. 7 figs. 9 tabs. ISBN 9780198796411 Hbk. £65). *Economic History Review*, 71(1), pp. 338-339.

There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

This is the peer reviewed version of the following article: Kininmonth, K. W. (2018) Clive Murray Norris, *The financing of John Wesley's Methodism c. 1740-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. xx+313. 7 figs. 9 tabs. ISBN 9780198796411 Hbk. £65). *Economic History Review*, 71(1), pp. 338-339, which has been published in final form at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/ehr.12670>. This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with [Wiley Terms and Conditions for Self-Archiving](#).

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/157035/>

Deposited on: 13 February 2018

Clive Murray Norris, *The financing of John Wesley's Methodism c.1740-1800*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. pp. xx+313. 7 figs. 9 tabs. ISBN 9780198796411 Hbk. £65)

As the title indicates this text by Clive Murray Norris (Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History, Oxford Brookes University) offers a business history of John Wesley's Methodist 'Connexion' and in particular how its' main activities were organised and financed. Wesleyan Methodism developed around 1738 as a way of reforming the Church of England, so Norris's book examines the financial implications of this new branch of the Church. Interestingly Norris does not explicitly state who he feels this book may be of most interest to, perhaps leaving it open to each reader to take away what they will.

Norris highlights that despite existing studies of local sets of accounts there have been 'few attempts at an overall financial appraisal of eighteenth century Wesleyanism in the British Isles' (p.6). He goes further by musing that a history of Wesleyan Methodism which did not address its financial underpinning would 'simply be incomplete' (p.7).

The reader is taken on a journey from the origins of the John Wesley movement (or Connexion as it was often called), delving in detail into the itinerant life the preachers endured as a result of the necessity to move around for their work, with often only small remuneration. The financing of the Connexion did not lend itself to stable employment for the itinerant preachers, with borrowing or debt finance applied to travel, accommodation and wages in the way it did for chapels and general funding of the movement.

The dominant activities of the eighteenth-century Wesleyan Methodist Connexion were the support of itinerant preaching, and the construction and maintenance of preaching houses. These were supported by a range of both regular and occasional flows of funds, primarily from members' contributions and gifts from supporters, but also various forms of debt finance and profits from the Book Room.

Norris divides the book into ten thematically focused chapters. Chapter one is useful for the non-specialist as it examines the role of preachers, before chapter two turns to examine the ways in which the Connexion actually financed those preachers. One aspect which became increasingly important for the Connexion was the necessity to support the wives and families of their itinerant preachers, and this is nicely explored in chapter three which offers details on the development of the Preacher's Fund which provided welfare.

Latter chapters move away from the funding of preachers by exploring the societies, circuits and the Connexion, the role of education, missions and wider welfare aspects. Books were produced by Wesley in order to spread the word and sold in the Book Room. Children were even sent to Wesley's boarding school. The success of these broader activities is highlighted when Norris claims, 'By the late 1780s, Wesleyanism was no longer John Wesley's personal fiefdom; it was becoming a sophisticated organization with an increasingly powerful central bureaucracy' (p. 152).

There are repeated references to the tension between Methodist's urge to recruit new members and expand their work, and the financial constraints faced by a movement with a predominantly working-class membership. Whether the continued expansion of the movement undermined the founder's original vision for the movement, or worse destroying it, is a key focus of the text. This is just one area in particular which offer much of use to a wide readership, ranging from those studying religious, economic, accounting or broader history.

Norris is refreshingly open regarding gaps in the surviving records and the resultant need to be aware of the scope for errors whilst generating the key financial figures. Economic and business historians will be acutely aware this is a frequent dilemma, so it is encouraging that a writer with a non-financial background has sought to grapple with how best to navigate these issues.

There are several areas which could have been expanded, for example whilst making some useful insights the section on the eighteenth-century business context could have offered non-accounting readers a more detailed background prior to exploring in depth the financial material. Overall though Norris constructs a text which is securely grounded in primary research, providing an important contribution to the histories of Methodism, finance, and religion as a whole. Those researching or teaching on broader courses should not dismiss the text out-of-hand, as Norris paints a colourful and detailed picture of the human struggles faced by those within the Connexion, on a personal, religious and financial level relative to the reality of their often difficult situation.

As a non-specialist to attempting a business history text Norris has provided a very thorough analysis of the specifics of the financing of John Wesley's Methodism during its first decades, which is both well constructed and offers compelling arguments.

KIRSTEN W. KININMONTH

*University of Glasgow*