

1918 Spanish flu etc

A recent magazine published by the RSNO talks about the orchestra's experience in the 1918 flu epidemic. The report says that there was little coverage of that epidemic in the press, presumably (the article suggests) so as not to lower morale. It appears that no concerts were cancelled during this period, though the Glasgow Herald's review of a concert in Glasgow in November 1918 commented on the number of empty seats, despite good ticket sales.

This article prompts the question of how the Edinburgh Bach Society fared in the 1918 epidemic. The Society's records make no mention of the epidemic. The Prospectus for the 1918-19 season does, however, refer to the aftermath of the War, noting that "the Society is still suffering from War-time conditions". The Prospectus also expresses the hope that "next year the Members on the Suspensory List will return to full Membership." The committee decided to go ahead with five recitals in the 1918-19 season, the first taking place at the peak of the epidemic, in November 2018. The press review stated that "As a whole the recital was one of the most interesting and successful of the many through the agency of which the Bach Society has done so much for the musical life of Edinburgh."

The committee minutes of 25 October 2018 make no reference to the ending of the War or to the flu epidemic. Instead, the committee's main concern was over the question of the Society's liability for Amusement Tax. The committee's conclusion was that "no charge being made at the doors, we were not liable to taxation".

David Dow
July 2022