

## **1926            General strike**

The main event in Britain in 1926 was the General Strike. It began on 3 May, triggered by the refusal of print unions on the Daily Mail to print an anti-union editorial. The underlying issues were to do with pay and conditions in the coal industry, issues which had resonated with railway and other transport employees, builders, printers, engineers, and workers in the shipyard and iron and steel industries. The strike, which lasted for nine days, was countered by volunteers, including many students. To the disappointment of foreign newspaper correspondents, there was scarcely any violence but instead football matches between strikers and police.

Did the members of the Edinburgh Bach Society put down their scores in support of the strikers? Or were they out driving the buses? We can only guess as the minutes are completely silent on the matter.

The main topic in the minutes for the 38th season (1925-26) was the death of Robert McEwen who had been the Society Secretary for several years at the beginning of the century during which time he was recognised as having “carried on the good work of popularising Bach’s music and that at a time when his music was still regarded as obscure and none of the present day facilities for the study of it were available.”

The minutes of this period make an interesting use of the verb ‘sustained’. We are told that the first concert, in December 1925, was ‘sustained’ by the Society’s Choir and Orchestra. The second concert, in February 1926 was ‘sustained’ by the Misses Brenner, Grierson and Stoneley. The December concert consisted of what is best described as the ‘best bits’, choruses and arias, from five different cantatas. The February concert had no choir but instead had ‘arias with obligate for various instruments’. The March concert saw the choir back in action with two cantatas and a motet, plus some choral preludes played on the organ. While all these concerts were 100% JS Bach there was daring innovation for the May concert (the month of the strike) when the programme consisted of chamber music by JS Bach’s sons.

The first three of these concerts were given in the University Music Class Room. The third was held in St Andrew’s Hall, Drumsheugh Gardens, which was demolished in 1957. All concerts were strictly for members of the Society only, though members could buy single guest tickets. There was no subscription to be a member of the choir or orchestra.

As a footnote it is interesting to note that in the seven years leading up to the General Strike Britain lost on average nearly 28 million days a year to strikes. In the seven years following the General Strike the average days lost each year was 4 million.