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It's carry on nursing as ambulance staff and teachers strike over pay

Nurses report for work while other colleagues join walk out



MARCHING ON
 Over 200 teachers took part in last week's Tunbridge Wells protest

Free Tennis Open Day
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SCAN ME

By Lilly Croucher

AMBULANCE workers serving Tunbridge Wells walked out on Monday as local teachers prepared for their second strike next month. Both are looking for improved pay and conditions.

However, NHS nurses at the hospital in Pembury carried on as normal, unlike their colleagues in other parts of the country who supported action. Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust (MTW) confirmed that their nurses are not striking after they voted not to take part in any industrial action.

Conversely, 3,500 ambulance workers from southern ambulance services went on strike on Monday (February 6) along with nurses around the country as part of the biggest health strike in NHS history.

GMB union members from South East Coast Ambulance Service (SECamb) voted in favour of industrial action and walked out on Monday from 12pm to 2am on Tuesday (February 7) morning.

Workers are 'furious' with the government's pay offer after the events of the Covid-19 pandemic

Workers staged picket lines outside ambulance centres across Kent, including Paddock Wood Make Ready Centre, Eldon Way following previous demonstrations on January 11 and 23. Ambulance staff were offered a four per cent pay rise by the government – an

additional £1,400 per worker – but the union rejected this and is demanding a pay rise closer to the rate of inflation, which is currently at 10.5 per cent.

Workers are 'furious' with the government's pay offer after the events of the Covid-19 pandemic and the queues of ambulances outside of A&E departments over Christmas.

More ambulance strikes are scheduled for SECamb staff on February 20, March 6 and 20 by the GMB Union.

Meanwhile, teachers are also getting ready to walk out again on March 2, 15 and 16 and the action is expected to impact more than 7,000 students from primary and secondary schools across Tunbridge Wells.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Teen pleads guilty to murder and robbery

A 17-year-old has pleaded guilty to the murder of Thomas Waugh, 20, at a hearing in Maidstone Crown Court on January 27.

The youth stabbed Mr Waugh to death by puncturing his left lung shortly before 1am in Tonbridge on August 19, 2022.

The teenager, who cannot be named for legal reasons, also admitted to attempted robbery of Mr Waugh and robbing two men with him of a gold chain, a packet of cigarettes and a £5 note.

The 17-year-old from Coulsdon, Surrey was remanded in custody and will be sentenced after the trial of a 16-year-old who has pleaded not guilty to the same charges.

A 47-year-old woman from Surrey is also expected to stand trial, accused of assisting an offender.

NHS Trust Star Awards 2023 open for entries

Nominations are now open for Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust's (MTW) Exceptional people, outstanding care Star Awards which recognises the hard work of their staff, volunteers and teams.

The Trust is asking members of the public to nominate their 'hospital heroes' who they feel have made a difference to patient care over the last year and should be celebrated at the Star Awards event in April.

The eight categories are: Patient First, Respect, Innovation, Delivery, Excellence, Team of the Year, Volunteer of the Year and Hospital Hero.

The deadline for nominations is 11.59pm on Saturday, February 28 and can be made at mtw.nhs.uk/awards/

Police seek van driver after fatal collision

KENT Police are looking to find a van driver who may have information about a road collision on Culverden Down which led to the death of a 75-year-old man in hospital.

Authorities say the vehicle is a van or minibus that was parked near Tunbridge Wells Football club, close to the scene of the collision which happened on Saturday January 7 around 5.15pm.

The victim was struck down by a driver in a white Volkswagen Transporter van who was later arrested at the scene and remains on bail until March 28.

Detective Sergeant Chris Wade said: "The vehicle we are still looking to trace was parked immediately next to where the collision happened.

"It is important we establish who it belongs to, as it may contain dashcam footage which could be important to the investigation.

Any information, please contact SCIU on 01622 798538 quoting reference 003/23 or email sciu.td@kent.pnn.police.uk

Events to mark war memorial centenary

The town will mark 100 years since the unveiling of the Tunbridge Wells War Memorial this Saturday (February 12) at an event led by The Mayor, Cllr Godfrey Bland.

An event will take place at the War Memorial at 11.55am on Saturday and will be attended by Leader, John Cohen, and members of the Royal British Legion to pay tribute to those who fought in both world wars. The Mayor will lay a wreath and a minute's silence will be observed.

All are welcome to attend a display in the Welcome Hall, The Amelia Scott, which will tell the story of the memorial and will include the original artist's model and other objects from the collection.

Second strike set to hit thousands of primary and secondary students

By Lilly Croucher

TEACHERS are planning further walkouts next month following a strike last week that saw thousands of students in Tunbridge Wells impacted by the action.

A second strike is set to take place on March 2 after members of the National Education Union (NEU) took to the streets of Tunbridge Wells last Wednesday (February 1) to demand better pay and conditions.

The strike is estimated to have affected over 7,000 students from secondary and primary schools across Tunbridge Wells.

'Teachers' pay has risen a little bit but it's coming out of the school budget which the government is not increasing. We think this is unacceptable'

Liz Hawker, an educator for children with Special Educational Needs and a parent, said: "I am 100 percent behind the teachers striking. What parents experience during the strikes is a drop in the ocean in comparison to what the teachers face every day.

"My son goes to Tunbridge Wells Boys Grammar School and had classes from home and the day went very smoothly."

Around 200 teachers marched from Calverley



HAVING THEIR SAY Teachers march through the town centre
Photo: Alice Reece

Grounds, up Mount Pleasant Road and through the town centre holding placards and chanting 'No ifs, No buts, No education cuts'.

There were members from secondary schools Tunbridge Wells Girls' Grammar School, Tunbridge Wells Grammar School for Boys, Skinner's School, St Gregory's and Bennett Memorial Diocesan as well as Claremont, St Marks, St Matthews and Holwood primary schools.

Members from Tonbridge and East Sussex schools travelled to join the rally.

Tom Hoskins, NEU Joint Secretary for West Kent told the Times: "Teachers pay has risen a little bit but it's coming out of the school budget which the government is not increasing. We think this is unacceptable. Teacher recruitment levels have fallen off a cliff.



ALL OUT Staff at Tunbridge Wells Girls' Grammar School get their point across

Value

"We are asking for an investment for our future because our kids are our future. You invest in the kids, you will have better educated, better chances, better monetary value to the future economy."

He added: "We are contracted to work 31.5 hours a week, that's what we earn our money for, but the average secondary school teacher works 50 hours a week, with primary school teachers working 60 hours a week, so we are putting in a lot of overtime and not getting any more pay."

Members of the NEU union voted overwhelmingly in favour of strike action.

The NEU has said that teachers were offered on average a five percent pay rise, seven percent behind inflation, which is why it's asking the government for a fully-funded, above inflation pay rise that is not coming out of the school budget.

The next day of strike action for schools in the town is expected to go ahead on March 2 with more strikes planned for March 15 and 16.

WHY WE ARE ON THE MARCH...

THE *TIMES* talked to a random selection of teachers about why they were on the protest march. Here's what they said:

'We have had to put off having another child'
Will Downing, English Teacher earning £34,000.

"I have a young family and we are financially breaking even at the moment, but I can see it getting worse and wanted to deal with this now by coming on strike, rather than in five years when we really are in trouble.

"One impact already is that me and my partner have decided that we are not going to have another a child because we can't afford it.

"I hope the strike resolves the issues but in reality it will hopefully get the ball rolling and get the government to plan better, think ahead and hopefully the next government will act on it."

'We are struggling to pay for our wedding'
Nathan Von Fraunhofer, History Teacher at Bennett Memorial on £29,800.

"I am a new teacher and despite having a

degree am making considerably less than my friends who are not teachers and some that don't have a degree.

"I am trying to get married this year and am struggling to find the money to pay for it.

"I get paid from 9 to 4 but in reality, I start my day at 8am and leave at 5.30pm, maybe even 7pm and I am not paid for those extra hours.

"Teachers will work at the weekends and on holiday to get ahead of marking and make lesson plans.

"Our wages are no longer competitive and as a result no one wants to become teachers anymore, that means teachers are having to work harder and we can't provide good education for our children."

'Morally corrupt pay taken from school budgets'

Mercedes Davis, Drama and English teacher at Tunbridge Wells Girls Grammar School.

"Education is at a crisis point, and I feel like the Government needs to pay attention, they need to listen to teachers and kids and parents

and they not doing that.

"I want a more sustainable plan for the future because schools are currently struggling to recruit and retain staff, so we have to think much more strategically to safeguard education.

"It is morally corrupt that wages are taken from school budgets and its unsustainable for the future of education. For me it's about how we think of and value education."

'Workload forced experienced teacher to quit'
Primary School Teacher, Tunbridge Wells, who asked not to be named.

"For me it's the long working hours with little to no compensation, I'm working till 8pm at night then I come home put the kids to bed and go to sleep and then I'm working on the weekends so I'm not seeing my family.

"Yes, you get holidays, but you have to work during the holidays too.

"There have been highly experienced teachers who have left because they can't deal with the workload."

“I’ve always wanted to perform”

Ahead of her gig at **Trinity Theatre** on February 15, comedian **Zoe Lyons** sits down with SO Magazine’s **Lilly Croucher** for an exclusive interview to talk about her latest show ‘Bald Ambition’. Here she reveals what life is like as a comedian, how she dealt with a ‘mid-life crisis’, and where her favourite venue in Tunbridge Wells is...

Hi Zoe, thank you for doing this interview with us. Could you tell us a little bit about who you are and the type of comedy that you do?

Sure! I started doing stand-up comedy about 21 years ago but I am also a presenter. I had a quiz show, *Lightning*, on BBC2 for a while and I do a few bits on Radio 4.

How did you get into comedy?

I only started when I was thirty as it took me a long time to have the courage to do it. I knew I always wanted to perform. When I left university, I went to drama school where I was always cast in the comedic roles and I loved stand-up comedy.

After school I started going to comedy clubs and eventually plucked up the courage to give it a go. My first gig was to around 10 to 15 people in a pub in North London and from that moment I said, “This is what I want to do.”

You’re kicking off the 2023 with your new tour *Bald Ambition*. What can we expect to hear?

This time the material is more personal because it is largely based on my difficult experience with the lockdowns. I know a lot of people went through a lot of changes and we are still emerging from it now three years later.

During the pandemic, I hit 50 and I had what I like to call a ‘classic mid-life crisis’ where I lost most of my hair and went through a marital separation. I was essentially a middle-aged woman with a comb-over who went through a break-up at the same time, but my wife and I are back together now so there is a happy ending!

I lost my hair from alopecia due to the stress of everything happening. For a while I didn’t want to perform and I didn’t feel like me at all. But talking and laughing about it on stage helped me accept it and that’s what got me back out there and performing.

Could you tell us what it was like having alopecia?

I first had alopecia as a kid when I was 10 or 11 years old and it coincided with my parents splitting up and moving to Scotland. I continued to have small patches on and off throughout my life but they did eventually grow back. But, at the start of the pandemic it really went for it and I lost 80 per cent of my hair.

Doing what I do for a living, people look at me but I didn’t want anyone to look at me which I found really hard. I didn’t want to go on stage and I thought maybe this is it and I’d have to do something else. But by talking about it I took control of it and when you take control of something you take the sting out of it and I’m so glad I did. Three years since it started to fall out, it’s now starting to grow back and as weird as my hair looks now, I love it.

You are playing in Tunbridge Wells on the February 15, have you ever visited the town before?

Yes, I have many times, the town is very pretty and the countryside around Tunbridge Wells is stunning.

I did a lot of my first ever gigs outside of London in Tunbridge Wells. One of those gigs was at The Forum which I remember as this old Victorian public toilet that was



Photos © Mark Vessey

“Bald Ambition’s material is based on my personal experience of lockdown. During the pandemic, I hit 50 and had what I like to call a classic mid-life crisis”

Zoe is playing at the Trinity Theatre on Wednesday, February 15 at 8pm. Tickets are available at trinitytheatre.net/events/zoe-lyons-bald-ambition

turned into a music venue. So yes, I performed in a toilet in Tunbridge Wells during my early days.

I also did a gig last summer at The Sussex Arms and it went really well, with a packed basement full of people, it was a really lovely gig.

Most people you meet from Tunbridge Wells are quite posh and they get a bit uppity when you say it and they try to convince you that they’re not as they squeak away in their quilted gilet jackets!

Have you played at Trinity Theatre before?

I don’t think I have, but I am looking forward to going back and not playing a toilet!

You’re a regular face on panel shows and voice on the radio, what else can we expect from you this year?

I’ve got stuff coming out on BBC Radio 4 – Just a Minute and The News Quiz, which I appear on regularly. I am also doing an episode for Dave’s ‘World’s Most Dangerous Roads’ which comes out this month. That was great fun to film, I did that with Joe Wilkinson, a Brighton-based comedian, driving around Eastern Turkey in a truck.

Living in Glasgow, you once worked in a jam-packing factory, what is your favourite flavour of jam?

Not strawberry and I hate lumpy jam, no one likes lumpy jam! I would say a well-produced, fine raspberry jam... with no lumps.

If you could do any type of TV show, what would you do?

I’d love to present a travel or nature show like David Attenborough. If I could combine a nature-comedy-travel show that would be great!

If you could have anybody on the bill for a show, who would you have?

I would absolutely have Joan Rivers; she was a marvel. Then Robin Williams who I had the privilege of seeing in a small club in London once testing some of his material. And then I would have some of my friends: Kerry Godliman, Jen Brister, Suzi Ruffell and Joe Wilkinson.

Any local comedians we should be keeping an eye out for?

If you’re into your one liners and puns, Mark Simmonds is brilliant. He is currently on tour and it’s great seeing him doing really well.