

Pair knighted in Sri Lanka

reporter **EMMA BARNES**



▲ **BRIAN and Jennie Charleston-Stokes with their awards.**
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A HUSBAND and wife team who specialise in alternative medicine have been knighted for their services to humanity while abroad.

Brian and Jennie Charleston-Stokes, of Salem Street, Gosberton, have just returned from five months in Sri Lanka working with patients in the Kalubowila South General Hospital.

Each year the couple spend the winter at the hospital, using their knowledge of therapies such as acupuncture, reflexology, remedial massage and herbal remedies to ease ailments, if not cure them.

And this year their hard work and dedication were rewarded when they were awarded the honour of the Knights of Malta of the Ecumenical Royal Medical Humanitarian Order of St John of Jerusalem.

Thousands of people attended the presentation at Bandaranaike International Memorial Hall.

Jennie (56) said: "It was a very moving occasion. We had known for a year that we were up for this award."

Six people received the accolade, including an Englishman from the Midlands.

But despite the importance of the occasion, Jennie said the abiding memory of their trip was a visit to border villages affected by war where women lived in makeshift huts made from banana and palm fronds.

They had little food for themselves or their children and those with husbands working away during the day would rely upon them to bring food home each day. If not, they would go without.

Brian Charleston-Stokes (65) suffers from asbestosis, and the couple find that spending winter in a warmer and drier climate helps the condition.

Jennie said: "We are giving our services to them but we are getting their wonderful sunshine and humidity that is so good for Brian's chest."

"We have been going for many years. We save up and save the money that we would have spent on coal through the winter. We do voluntary work there because they need doctors and skilled workers to staff their hospitals."

The couple organise their trips through Medicina Alternativa, a Sri-Lankan based organisation which works throughout the world. Almost all of the medicine practised at Kalubowila Hospital is alternative, with Jennie also teaching.

Since 1962 at least two-and-a-half million patients have passed through the hospital doors, with hundreds of people now flocking there each day, some of them travelling 80 miles.

The Charleston-Stokes stayed in a hotel during their time in Sri Lanka, paying around £4 a day board. To get to work they used buses, which proved an experience in itself.

Jennie, who is a doctor of alternative medicine, said: "The buses are horrendous. For every 40 people sitting there are 80 people standing."

"When you are hanging for dear life on the bottom step of a bus it can be quite nerve-wracking!"

"The locals think we are mad. They say do you have a home in England?"

"Do you have a washing machine? Do you have a television? Why do you leave that to come and live in this place?"

"I feel I am useful in Sri Lanka. I feel I am giving back as much as I am getting out of