



NEWS RELEASE

(For immediate release)

The Royal Canadian Geographical Society awards the Gold Medal to Sir Christopher Ondaatje

The Royal Canadian Geographical Society is pleased to announce that it has awarded the Gold Medal, its most prestigious award, to Sir Christopher Ondaatje in recognition of his long abiding support for geography.

Through his travels and his writing, Ondaatje has contributed to a greater understanding of the world and of the relationship between and among peoples and lands. Adventurer, author and philanthropist, Sir Christopher Ondaatje has played an abiding role in furthering the geographic literacy of Canadians and the Society is proud and pleased to acknowledge his incomparable contribution.

The Gold Medal ceremony took place prior to a reception that was hosted by the Society at Massey College, Toronto, ON, on November 17, 2011, to celebrate the publication of Sir Christopher's latest book, *The Last Colonial*.

The Royal Canadian Geographical Society is among Canada's largest, bilingual, not-for-profit educational organizations. The Society is dedicated to imparting a broader knowledge and deeper appreciation of Canada — its people and places, its natural and cultural heritage and its environmental, social and economic challenges.

Sir Christopher Ondaatje

Sir Christopher Ondaatje was born in Sri Lanka, educated in England and built a successful career in finance and publishing in Canada. In the early nineties he sold all his business interests and returned to writing where he himself has broken new ground as a respected book reviewer and a writer of thought-provoking books dealing with significant biographical, historical and geographical events.

Since 1995 Ondaatje has devoted his time to travelling, writing, and administering The Ondaatje Foundation. He is a life patron of the National Portrait Gallery where the Ondaatje Wing is named after him. The Ondaatje Theatre at The Royal Geographical Society, and The Ondaatje Prize at both The Royal Society of Literature and The Royal Society of Portrait Painters are other major benefactions. He was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in June 2000, and awarded a Knighthood in the Queen's honours list, June 2003.

***The Last Colonial* (Thames and London, 2011)**

This is an autobiography in essays that conjures up a truly unique portrait of a world that is fast disappearing. Christopher Ondaatje is a true child of the British Empire. Born in Ceylon in 1933 and brought up on a tea plantation, he was sent as a teenager to boarding school in England. But soon after Ceylon was granted its independence in 1948, his family found themselves destitute, and the young Ondaatje left school and got a job. From these beginnings there followed a series of commercial triumphs until 1988 when he abruptly abandoned high finance at the peak of his career and reinvented himself as an explorer and an author, focusing mainly on the colonial period. It is the curious encounters behind these often precarious adventures that make up this book. The stories tell of Ondaatje's childhood days, his early life in Canada, his fascination with inexplicable events and local superstitions, and sometimes perilous travels researching his acclaimed biographies. Illustrated throughout with original images by Ana Maria Pacheco, "*The Last Colonial*" lives up to the romance of its tantalizing title.

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