

## IHSS Research Seminar Program 2024

# Undiscovering Emerald Island: Phantom Islands in the Southern Ocean World

**Dr Rohan Howitt (Monash University)**

Chairs: Assoc. Prof. Nell Musgrove (NSAH) & Dr. Sarah Bendall (IHSS)

**Tuesday 4 June, 12-1pm AEST**

To be held in room 460.3.01 and online via Teams



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**Abstract:** In January 1839, the four ships of the globetrotting United States Exploring Expedition became separated during storms and fog soon after leaving Sydney. In line with the instructions given to them by the fleet's commander before departure, each ship set a course for Emerald Island, planning to regroup there before continuing south towards Antarctica. But when they reached the location marked on their charts, the US ships sailed over open ocean; Emerald Island was nowhere to be found. Despite this, Emerald Island continued to appear on hundreds of maps until at least the 1940s, wedged into the same position 1,800 kilometres south-east of Tasmania that it had occupied since its 'discovery' in 1821.

This paper uses the enduring cartographic presence of Emerald Island to consider the wider phenomenon of 'phantom' islands in the Southern Ocean. I argue that focusing on efforts to conclusively disprove the existence of these phantom islands provides a window into the production and transformation of environmental knowledge of the Southern Ocean in the 19th and 20th centuries.

**Bio:** Dr Rohan Howitt is a lecturer in environmental history at Monash University. He is a global and environmental historian of the Southern Ocean world, focusing on the interconnected histories of Australia, Antarctica, the subantarctic islands, and the Southern Ocean itself.