Correcting with Care: Rosemary Mack and The Women's Press
Feminist historiography in crisis

This is an article in process. Assertions are documented. Dialogue is welcomed.

Dr Rosemary Mack's research on The Women's Press, from 2018-2026, examined against the documented corrections of Dr Stephanie Dowrick, founder, co-owner and later Chairperson of TWP

The Women's Press, London (1977–2002/3): Correcting the Record

Prepared July-September 2026. All corrections cited here are supported by contemporaneous documents, correspondence and the 2026 exchange reproduced in the **Notes**.

> *"Duly noted, be assured that I will not quote from the interview or the email in my book. As stated, any changes to the manuscript would have been additions to enrich the texture of the prose, not substantive rewrites. As stated, I stand behind my approach, its value, and its contributions to scholarship. You have made your position quite clear. I will not be debating this matter."*
>
> — Dr Rosemary Mack to Dr Stephanie Dowrick, 15 April 2026, closing four months of correspondence (Italics added)

1. Purpose and evidence base

Dr Rosemary Mack (University of Birmingham) is publishing a monograph on The Women's Press (TWP) with Duke University Press, tentatively titled *Reading with Care: Feminist Textual Process at The Women's Press*[1]. Despite working on TWP for at least eight years — through a Masters article (2018), a doctoral thesis, and the present book — Mack made no contact with the Press's founder, co-

[1] Has the title been changed? In response to Professor Barrett's plea? We have not been advised directly. We are aware that Professor Murray has endorsed the proposed book, despite being advised of her own extensive misrepresentations on which Mack has relied.

owner and later Chairperson, Dr Stephanie Dowrick, until February 2026. Dowrick is internationally published and publicly contactable. Contact came only after a British colleague alerted Mack to Dowrick's “alive-and-well presence in Australia”.

Mack herself recognised what this omission meant. In her first email (7 February 2026) she wrote:

> *“I … can't imagine starting a project [TWP] so historically important as well as politically radical, then have some random upstart writing about it without consulting with me. Then to have them reach out once the whole thing is done and say, 'Oops it's done. No time to correct it,' would add insult to injury. I'd bet that that'd be insulting, frustrating, and any number of other things that I'm not in an experiential position to really know.”*

Between February and April 2026, Dowrick supplied Mack with: a recorded oral-history interview (10 March); a 30-page written response to Mack's own questions (24 March); contemporaneous letters, faxes and audit-related material from 1977–1996 (from 23 March); detailed corrections to Mack's 2018 published article (28 March); and introductions to Professors Michèle Barrett (Queen Mary, University of London) and Helen Taylor (Emeritus, Exeter), both with direct knowledge of the founding years, both willing to be interviewed.

None of this essential corrective material was incorporated. Mack's permissions request (2–3 April) drew solely on founding anecdotes from the interview; the substantive corrections were passed over entirely (Note 1 - below). Permission was declined because granting it could have appeared to endorse the work as a whole. On 15 April Mack closed the correspondence with the statement quoted above, confirming that any changes would have been “additions to enrich the texture of the prose, not substantive rewrites”.

This document sets out, with sources, where Mack's account diverges from the material evidence; the pattern of research choices

that produced that divergence; and what both mean for feminist publishing history, print history, and feminist historiography more generally.

A note on scope.

Mack states that "the way that the press, its workers and its authors went about making feminist culture became the heart of [the] book, rather than tracing its history."

That framing is her prerogative. However, in the case of a political press, and where her version of "making feminist culture" is explicitly contestable (as shown below), at TWP this cannot be reasonably understood apart from the specific context in which such "culture" was "made".

It is entirely noteworthy that the sum of Rosemary Mack's preferred assumptions privileged over facts would rob TWP of its legitimate place as an exceptional example of a publishing/media "vehicle" founded and used to promote the values and aims of the women's liberation movement – and to demonstrate political and campaigning leadership through highly professional publishing.

Even a most basic understanding of the context and culture at TWP must include at least some evidence of comprehending:

- a) the 1977 founding purpose and motivation (including an understanding of what ground-breaking work from writers this produced, and how this was achieved with minimum expenditure and to maximum effect;
- b) the specific financing and management structure established by the founder and co-owner, Stephanie Dowrick, to ensure the legitimacy of the claim to be a women's publishing house, not reliant upon institutional, government or "patronage" support;

- c) the furthering of the political values and ethics representing the women's liberation movement (WLM) and the civil rights movement (CRM) marking it as a political activist press – that would also contribute significantly to the emerging field(s) of women's studies;
- d) the professionalised publishing values that allowed high levels of visibility as a trade publisher in high street book shops without losing in fact gaining from explicit radicalism;
- e) a scrupulously maintained understanding by Dowrick and by later MD, Kathy Gale, that **linked editorial and management independence with accountability and solvency**, securing the ability of TWP "to stand on its own feet" without patronage or subsidies.

Without these multiple factors, most especially the last, there could be no legitimate claim to be a women's press at all. (It should be noted that the "crisis period" under the leadership of Ros de Lanerolle and others exhibited a totally unfounded assumption that co-owner Naim Attallah should subsidise the dramatic losses - £344.046 over three years; almost one million pounds in 2026 value - for which neither accountability nor responsibility was ever taken.)

Mack draws heavily on the unsubstantiated views of Simone Murray (2004) that, along with the views of Catherine Riley (2018) and others are strongly challenged by material evidence rejected by Mack (and ignored by Murray herself, despite a 2026 communication).

Indeed, it is feminist legitimacy within what she describes erroneously as a "corporate structure" that Murray undermines the founding structure and achievements of TWP and ignores its revival.

There is no sign of Mack questioning the myth of the "corporate structure" and unwelcome "interference" from a commercially minded "owner". This was strongly refuted by Dowrick in conversation and in writing. (Documents to be archived.)

Mack's misreading of the entire 1985-1991 period results in "impressions" and "conclusions" unharnessed from factual evidence, forming the basis of her own epistemic failures and refusal to confront them. These "views" rely upon a highly romanticised view of the "processes" and "workers" that in fact brought TWP to the brink of collapse, risking all that had been achieved and the publishing security of 100s of authors[2].

Her interviewees are "workers" interviewed thirty-plus years later, who, on the evidence, entirely deflected responsibility for the crisis that brought TWP to the brink of collapse, plus accountability for the years of publishing chaos that led to it. Perhaps Mack was not informed by those she interviewed of de Lanerolle's efforts in 1990 to establish **Miriam Books**, while also benefitting from the profile she established at TWP – and the benefits of "inheriting" an existing highly-regarded imprint where the major authors had been sourced by Dowrick between 1977-1983-5[3].

Three attempts by de Lanerolle to establish an "alternative structure"

That first attempt was Miriam Books (1990); the second (1991) was an attempted management buy-out of TWP (1991) – with claims made of money raised that have never been substantiated; the third (1992) was Open Letters with Gillian Hanscombe and Alison Hennegan.

None of these resulted in raising substantial funds (as Virago had done, including from Rothschild Ventures), the establishment of a publishing or distribution structure, or the publication of a single title. Meanwhile, post-crisis, TWP returned to solvency, regained its

[2] These "views" additionally very seriously deny the agency of Dowrick in establishing TWP as an independent, women-run publishing house dependent upon a highly conditional overdraft, guaranteed by co-founder Naim Attallah within his informal "Namara Group" on the basis of Dowrick's professional expertise, widespread publishing and political global contacts, an explicit vision – and commitment to independence based on solvency (which included her founding in 1980 TWP Bookclub).

[3] The actual titles separately contracted by Dowrick and by de Lanerolle into 1982 for publication beyond 1982 and 1983 appear on a Board Report requested by Dowrick that de Lanerolle finally completed in detail. This is posted on the TWP website.

professionalism and public integrity, and continued to publish until 2002/3.

Mack's lack of understanding of TWP as a political activist press or as a viable unsubsidised trade publisher bringing radical books into the mainstream, is exacerbated by the material evidence that she has chosen to ignore. This raises urgent issues of integrity, ethics, and veracity for the author and for her publishers. It also brings into question the reliability of the peer review system.

Mack demonstrates a serious lack of understanding of trade publishing realities

The financial record in the period of Mack's interest. Expenditure at TWP grew unsustainably from 1985–1990 (a dozen staff by 1990); too many books were published into an uninterested market; mass-market print runs resulted in stock write-downs; advances were paid on multiple projects with no hope of delivery. Additional to unsustainable staff costs was the employment of free-lancers whose costs would never be recouped via sales; persistent failures in some categories were frequently repeated. Accountability was entirely absent.

Reviewing the catalogues and surviving correspondence, Dowrick concludes (to Mack) that "Ros and others may well have been publishing too many authors ('Third World' among them) for whom they couldn't get decent reviews OR sales. That's unsustainable, by any measure."

The preferred accounts "did not come near the fact that TWP was by then 'on its knees'." The widely published TWP losses figure, available to Mack from multiple sources, was £300,000.

In reality, as documented on TWP website, it was £344, 086, equivalent in 2026 to almost one million pounds[4].

[4] As a point of reference, the house that Dowrick bought alone in the East End of London, and that was the founding "office" of TWP, was worth £15,000.

The publishing processes heroicised by Mack lost TWP considerable prestige and presence within the British book trade. Further, from 1990, de Lanerolle had lost focus on TWP whose "decline if not demise" she was predicting to her business adviser, Robert Oakshott[5], as she made the first of her attempts to set up a worker-run rival feminist press, and to take, as she claimed, "key staff with her".

2. The 2026 exchange between Mack and founder Dowrick at a glance

7 Feb 2026	First contact, prompted by a British colleague. Mack concedes that failing to consult the founder of "a project so historically important as well as politically radical" would be "insulting, frustrating" (quoted in full above).
10 Mar 2026	Oral-history interview (Zoom), recorded.
23 Mar 2026	Dowrick sends contemporaneous 1991–96 factual evidence that all was far from well at TWP before Ros de Lanerolle's departure, and of a documented recovery afterwards (Note 2).
23 Mar 2026	Mack acknowledges receipt the same evening; calls the material "very good to know as background"; declines to quote it; maintains that the co-MD's (post de Lanerolle) jobs were "enormously difficult" — a partial framing Dowrick corrects the next morning (Note 2).
24 Mar 2026	Dowrick sends the 30-page written response to Mack's questions, with an open offer: "You are free to come back to me for clarification where needed" (Note 3).

[5] Document posted on TWP website archive.

27 Mar 2026	Mack replies that she is “pretty swamped with work” and will not comment on Dowrick's corrective draft for the LSE archive; promises a permissions request within the week (Note 3).
28 Mar 2026	Dowrick sends detailed factual corrections to Mack's 2018 article on *Greenham Common: Women at the Wire* — errors carried forward into the doctoral and current work (Note 5). Receipt confirmed by auto reply; the substance never answered.
2–3 Apr 2026	Mack's permissions request: quotations selected from founding anecdotes only; none of the 30-page document's corrective content (Note 1).
8 Apr 2026	Dowrick declines permission pending evidence that the corrections have been engaged with; offers to read any chapters where “a more complete story has already been realised. Or will now be” (Note 6).
13 Apr 2026	Dowrick restates the outstanding factual issues in six numbered points, cc'ing Professors Barrett and Taylor, who repeat their offers to speak with Mack; sends a February 1991 *British Book News* interview with de Lanerolle discovered that day in her files (Note 7).
15 Apr 2026	Dowrick: “I want nothing more than for you to include more of what I have given you … It ought to be a serious researcher's dream.”
15 Apr 2026	**Mack: “I stand behind my approach … I will not be debating this matter.” Correspondence closed by Mack. Future dialogue disallowed.**

3. Assertions by Mack, corrections by Dowrick, side by side

Direct excerpts. Mack's wording is drawn from her correspondence, interview questions and published 2018 article; Dowrick's corrections

from her 24 March written response and subsequent emails. Corrections to the 2018 article specifically are tabulated separately in Note 5.

Issue	Mack's assertion / framing	Documented correction (Dowrick)
The 1991 crisis	*"From the archive and the press reporting, it seemed from a distance to have been hugely intense and traumatic for all parties … From the interviews I was able to do, the impact of 1991 on former TWP folks, and the sense that the fissures had never really fully healed, was only confirmed."*	"'Intense and traumatic' was true for some, not for all. My justifiable fear is that this story has really taken hold because it suited what seemed to be conventionally the 'most feminist' narrative. Whether it fitted less 'useful' facts, or not. (Simone Murray's account shows that.)" The contemporaneous record — continuing catalogues, the 1998 twentieth-anniversary celebrations, the authors who stayed with or joined TWP in the Gale-led years — shows that crisis was followed by revival: "1991 was a POSITIVE turning point - not a 'catastrophe'."
Scale and staffing	*"…the more than 700 titles it published, the dozens if not hundreds of*	"Not even 'dozens' of women worked at the Press – or Bookclub!! Also, 700 titles is a big

Issue	Mack's assertion / framing	Documented correction (Dowrick)
	women who worked there over the years."	claim. Where did you get that figure?" Staffing was deliberately small; production, sales repping, accounting and royalty reporting were carried by Quartet Books via the Namara Group — "a huge benefit." Early audit reports survive and will go to the LSE archive.
What TWP was for	*"…the way that the press, its workers and its authors went about making feminist culture became the heart of [the] book, rather than tracing its history." Analytical focus on the crime and science-fiction lists.*	"All the work, heartache and losses as well as gains that came with founding and running TWP from 1977-1982 (then very actively supporting from 1982-84, then working hard with the co-MDs from 1991 as a highly involved Chair) were not in the exclusive service of 'lesbian crime fiction', nor 'feminist science fiction' … **Those brilliant, brave, ground-breaking authors who DARED to critique and even smash the status quo appear to be entirely absent**." This is a

Issue	Mack's assertion / framing	Documented correction (Dowrick)
		serious intellectual as well as political failure. Queer/lesbian writing by pioneers like May Sarton, Monique Wittig, Sylvia Townsend-Warner, Lisa Alther, Andrea Dworkin, Mary Daly, Joanna Ryan, Isabel Miller, Susan Griffin, also ignored.
Founding and ownership	*2018 article: TWP "was founded in 1977 by Stephanie Dowrick and Sybil [sic] Grundberg as an imprint of Quartet books."* *Catherine Riley (relied on by Mack) has Attallah founding TWP and "installing" Dowrick "to run the business."*	TWP was never an imprint of Quartet. Grundberg was an early literary advisor, not a founder; Attallah is omitted entirely, "yet the Press … could not have come into existence without his financial backing." Ownership: 100 £1 shares — Attallah 53%, Dowrick 47% (Attallah's own published account). Dowrick was solely responsible for the guaranteed overdraft and for editorial direction (Note 4). Riley's version is "insulting, untrue, and a

Issue	Mack's assertion / framing	Documented correction (Dowrick)
		quite shocking misstep for a scholar."
Naim Attallah	*The narrative repeated across Murray, Riley and Mack: Attallah as interfering owner who refused a £500,000 buyout from de Lanerolle and complained the Press published "too many Third World writers" — claims for which no evidence has been produced.*	"He had the grace to back down when I challenged him on any interference with the politics and especially the publishing decisions of TWP … He did not misuse his power. Not with me. I want that on the record." "It is inescapable that TWP would not have come into existence without Naim's willingness to back an enterprise that would quite soon be (in my view) significantly more challenging than the publishing Virago was doing." On the repeated claims: "What/who was the primary source? Also, the same narratives - WITHOUT EVIDENCE, or none yet produced??"
Design identity	*"…the iconic design identity that the press developed – the*	"The witty 'iron' concept, 'the iconic design identity that the press

Issue	Mack's assertion / framing	Documented correction (Dowrick)
	conversations between you and [Susanne Perkins] which led to the aesthetic style which would mark the press out so distinctively."	developed', plus the slogans, was work I did with [Canadian graphic artist] Donna Muir, not Susanne … [who] was not an 'iconic' or big-picture creative as Donna was." Muir's designs "look fresh and brilliant half a century on."
The archive	*"After spending three months alone in the archive, I felt a familiarity with the labor of The Women's Press…"* *Mack acknowledges the archive contained "very little in the way of administrative or financial information … missing also the correspondence with the most prominent authors" — yet treats it as a sufficient evidentiary base.*	"The archive is certainly not exhaustive. Do you know when it was donated? And who gathered the materials it contains? … So [much of the correspondence on so] many of the books I was involved with are not there, at all. Nor the books I wrote – where TWP bought British rights. Where are those records? Who 'decided'?" The gaps in the records of the more than 80 books with which Dowrick was associated — and key titles published later under

Issue	Mack's assertion / framing	Documented correction (Dowrick)
		Gale — are “startling, and regrettable.”
Academic authority	*Heavy reliance on Murray (2004) and Riley; peer review conducted by scholars drawing on the same sources, so the errors “could not have been picked up by 'peers' reviewing your work, relying on the same sources.”*	“One academic following the 'evidence' of another, without adequately interrogating the original account, but only drawing inferences from it.” “With sadness as well as frustration, I have been struck by how similar the remarks are about the founding and financial sustaining of the Press from Simone Murray, Catherine Riley, and yourself.”
Power and organisation	*Organisational history treated as secondary to textual and genre analysis; the “power to tell” examined chiefly through a limited access to archival material and a striking lack of curiosity about what was clearly missing..*	“Who had that power, in the turbulent immediate post-Ros period? Why were other voices so emphatically silenced or trivialised? … 'Organisational history' cannot be separated from that, most especially in an explicitly political publishing house.”

Issue	Mack's assertion / framing	Documented correction (Dowrick)
		The “power to tell” and redress of silenced voices ran through TWP's whole history, 1977–2002/3. It was not unique to the crisis period.

4. What Mack’s research leaves out

Two decades of a twenty-five-year history. Mack's account effectively excludes 1977–1989 (founding and first decade) and 1991–2002/3 (recovery and later publishing), while the 1989–1991 crisis — by her own count “only circa 4–5 pages in the book” — supplies an interpretive frame for her romanticised, ahistorical account of a) TWP publishing processes from 1985-1991 (her principal focus); b) their consequence in real world publishing terms; c) the threat to which this exposed TWP – *without unlimited patronage or subsidies.*

Mack’s preferred enquiries appear only to consolidate her already-established confirmation bias.]

Mack's own explanation, in her words. Asked why she omitted the founding period and never approached the founder, Mack wrote that the 1991 events “seemed from a distance to have been hugely intense and traumatic” and that she feared appearing “a ghoulish gossip mongerer [sic]” — concluding: “in being so anxious about how I came off, I actually did what I'd been trying neurotically to avoid – to be extractive in my research process … by not doing enough to seek out your knowledge. This explanation may well not seem adequate, and I doubt in your shoes that I'd be happy with it.”

The explanation, whatever its sincerity, describes a research design built on an untested assumption, arguably unreliable interviews 30+

years later, with no interest in what secured TWP for a further dozen years of publishing.

The founding-decade achievement. The intersectional, political and literary list that established TWP plus pioneering work with LGBTQI+ authors, and prescient publishing on sexual politics, peace, environment, art history and mental health is unexamined.

Why is the founding decade relevant?

The major authors of the foundation era were those who had an indisputable influence on the vital emerging fields of women's studies in the UK, USA, ANZ, and on the essential cross-over between trade and academic publishing, ensuring the authentic democratisation of key feminist ideas. This is the basis of political publishing within a feminist and WLM context. It cannot legitimately be overlooked; nor can the transparent financial/management structure that allowed it.

From its inception in 1977, TWP achieved rare imprint loyalty and mainstream success for radical books. The subversive role played in witty, playful "branding" led by Dowrick with Canadian designer, Donna Muir, is overlooked by Mack in favour of oral testimony from cover designer, Suzanne Perkins, on whose behalf in 1991 de Lanerolle made a number of claims that, again, cannot be substantiated by material evidence[6].

The founding principle – and "process". Absent from Mack is any recognition that TWP was founded on editorial and management independence dependent on trade (unsubsidised) publishing as well as political acumen and linked to solvency. To quote Dowrick to Mack, TWP "was never envisioned to be a Sheba, or OnlyWomen. It was ALWAYS intended to be a publishing house where excellent writing only would be published, professionally and stylishly … That was the 'process'!"

[6] See especially the British Book News article of 1991, made available to Mack, posted on TWP archive.

Favouring genre publishing (including the financially costly SF list) over the sexual, intersectional and radical cultural politics that drove TWP's major authors and most lasting publishing, inverts the Press's actual purpose and record. It also plays into a narrative heavily endorsed by Murray (2004) and Riley (2018) that denies Dowrick's vision and agency in founding TWP.[7] The misrepresentations of the 1977 co-ownership and business arrangements between Dowrick and Attallah and their radical transparency are egregious. Murray's insistence that TWP had "corporate backing" cannot be substantiated. Nor that it was a "corporate structure" that stifled TWP during the final (crisis) years of the de Lanerolle era (See 5 below).

Murray (2004) claims erroneously that de Lanerolle was sacked[8],[9]. Mack too ignores the lack of accountability by de Lanerolle, Lefanu and other "senior staff" for the losses, financial and in terms of integrity and public perception[10]. Yet, following in Murray's footsteps, Mack refuses factual evidence to correct the record.

[7] Dowrick had already been, at the age of 25, Editorial Manager of New English Library (offshoot of New American Library); at the age of 27, founding Managing Editor of Triad Paperbacks (owned by Jonathan Cape, Chatto & Windus, The Bodley Head, together with Granada Publishing); then at 29, founder and co-owner of TWP, working as sole f/time employee and from her own home to reduce costs, minimise borrowings, until such time as TWP could recoup income from book sales, then from TWP Bookclub that she founded in 1980.

[8] [8] In her book, *Mixed Media* (Pluto Press, 2004), Simone Murray explicitly states: "Attallah, as the owner of the press (sic), was the party in the dominant position during the ensuing dispute, and he was able to achieve his desired outcome: the dismissal of de Lanerolle; a revamping of the press's list priorities away from Commonwealth and third-world writing; and the appointment of a more commercially sympathetic management team." (Page 81)

[9] These claims of Attallah's "interference" and "commercial" priorities were shamelessly exploited by disgruntled staff and outside actors when he stepped in to save TWP on behalf of Dowrick, the Board and authors, via the restructuring led by Dowrick as TWP Chair, and implemented by Kathy Gale as Publishing Director then co-MD.

[10] As serious, at a press that had from 1978 onwards prided itself on its leadership in anti-racist politics, the racist attacks on Palestinian-born Attallah echoed those of a highly conservative, white-dominated trade and mainstream UK media.

5. The 1991 “crisis” narrative more closely examined

The period from 1985-1991 is the focus of Mack’s central interest in TWP publishing “processes”. This cannot be divorced from the financial, ethical and integrity crisis that threatened TWP survival.

The following key points are unacknowledged by Murray, Riley, Mack and others.

- The documented danger to TWP's survival through gross financial mismanagement and lack of accountability;
- The failure of de Lanerolle’s three attempts to publish any book outside the structure created by Dowrick;
- The basis on which TWP was revived – and continued publishing, including retaining key authors – like Alice Walker, Angela Davis, Lucy Goodison, Mary Daly, and many others originally contracted by Dowrick – as well as later publishing successes like bell hooks, Beatrix Campbell, Kim Chernin, Val McDermid, expanding not contracting the commitment to queer and intersectional writing.

The unevidenced “management” buyout. The claim that Attallah “wilfully refused” a £500,000 offer from de Lanerolle in 1991 is repeated without evidence or clarity as to what was supposedly being bought. To quote Dowrick to Mack: “the stock? the debts? ongoing contracts?” The companion claim, that Attallah — a Palestinian — objected to the Press publishing “too many Third World writers”, is equally unevidenced and carries its own unexamined subtext. *Dowrick's contemporaneous letter to the Guardian, correcting the 1991 media reporting, was supplied to Mack*. Attallah’s letter to the *Guardian* in the same period was widely available and is now in the TWP on-line Archive.

The February 1991 British Book News interview. Discovered in Dowrick's files during the March-April 2026 exchange and sent to Mack on 13 April: de Lanerolle, interviewed while the Press was failing under her leadership, dismisses Dowrick's ownership (asserting Attallah held “all the shares”), places Dowrick in New

Zealand from 1981 denying her years of active engagement and mentorship of de Lanerolle herself until early 1985 (document of book contracted to late 1982 in Archive show the majority and all lead titles contracted by Dowrick for publishing 1983-4 and beyond). Further, de Lanerolle claims credit for the best-known authors, including Janet Frame of New Zealand, as well as Alice Walker, both of whom had major film tie-ins at the time. She makes no reference to the politics and publishing experience on which TWP was built, credits no one for the vital brand identity, and describes Dowrick's Shoreditch office as "a slum".

Mack shows no interest in this documentation. Is unmoved by Dowrick's evident distress.

Post-1991: Revival and recovery – NOT acknowledged as significant by Mack

The recovery. From 1991, under joint Managing Directors Kathy Gale (previously of Pan) and Mary Hemming, with Dowrick as active Chair TWP returned to solvency[11].

Contemporaneous letters and faxes attest to "a real feeling of excitement, even renaissance" — as well as to the bullying endured by Gale and others who remained loyal to the Press and saved it (Note 2). This thirteen-year period from 1990 –2002 and the political as well as publishing achievements it represents is either misrepresented, or ignored completely by Murray, Riley, Mack and others. *That success cannot be described without a far more honest account of the publishing failures, lack of loyalty and focus, and crisis that preceded it*.

[11] (Figures all available in TWP on-line archive.) Thanks to a dramatic renewal of publishing experience and professionalism from Gale and her team (a number of whom have gone on to high level publishing success elsewhere), steadier publishing, far greater author confidence and security, significantly better rights sales, and an essential grip on costs and expenditure, Gale returned TWP to the founding principle of editorial and management total independence, linked to solvency and accountability.

Allen & Unwin distribution in Australia and New Zealand was secured by Dowrick. A celebrated twentieth anniversary attracted widespread positive media in 1998. TWP continued publishing to 2002/3.

6. Implications for feminist publishing history

The issue is not one of competing narratives or interpretations; it is a body of scholarship in which factual errors pass from one account to the next unexamined. A version of events became dominant because it suited a favoured “most feminist” storyline; peer review, conducted by scholars drawing on the same cloistered, undocumented sources, could not catch it.

The result does a profound disservice to readers, to staff loyal to TWP, and to its exceptional authors. It trivialises or obliterates the creativity, commitment and actual (not imagined) publishing “processes" it took to publish radical, innovative books into the mainstream, relying on the professionalism of Dowrick and her successors to redefine feminist print activism.

What is needed for ethical feminist scholarship

To correct Mack’s account of “processes” and whatever history she chooses to present or imply, and for future more transparently ethical work on feminist publishing, print history and historiography, the record of this exchange points to four obligations, basic to any claim to ethical scholarship:

- **Interrogate assumptions against material evidence** — catalogues, contracts, correspondence, audited accounts — of what was achieved and risked, not only against curated archives and prior scholarship. Ask who compiled an archive, what was left out, and why. Check rigorously for examples of confirmation bias in your own and others’ work; quoting previously biased accounts that are not based on documented evidence betrays the “power to speak/tell/witness/write” at the heart of feminist publishing
- **Prioritise direct engagement with key participants** across the widest period possible, not relying on oral evidence from a limited period only without exploring contemporaneous documentation across the entire history.
- **Challenge inherited confirmation bias**, especially where one version of events has become dominant because it is narratively

convenient, fits a pre-conceived model, and *where peer reviewers rely on the same disqualified secondary sources as the author*.

- **Uphold the highest standards of scholarly and feminist integrity.** Who controls the narrative — who has "total agency in the telling, re-telling; and what narrative emerges from that, to what effect" — is itself a central feminist question, as central to scholarship about the movement as it was to the movement.

On 28 March 2026, Dowrick asked Mack: "*Do you have a source where this early misinformation you drew on can also be corrected?"* Mack did not respond.

Further: Mack (2018) '**After spending three months alone in the archive, I felt a familiarity with the labor of The Women's Press and some of the ways in which it interacted with other structures and spaces.** (Our bold.)

Dowrick, 2026: "This is painful to read as "**three months alone in the archive"** does not appear to have given you anything like a full picture of the earliest and most effective TWP years as publishers, and as *political publishers*. (This is surely something worth looking at? I have to question again the nature of that archive…given your assumptions; and ask again who - do you know? - collated the archive and *decided what to leave out*? Also, from the valuable post 1991 years?) **Your dependence on that archive, and what it contained (and left out), has seriously constricted your research - which I hope can now be at least somewhat remedied."** (Our bold.)

It was not acknowledged. It was not remedied.

7. Conclusion

Dr Mack was offered — late in her project, but with significant awareness of urgency on the part of Dr Dowrick and before her manuscript was due to be copy-edited for 2027 publication — the founder's testimony, thirty pages of documented answers to her own

questions, contemporaneous correspondence spanning two decades, corrections to her earlier published errors, and interviews with two senior professors with first-hand knowledge of the founding years.

She declined to use it, stating that changes would in any case have been “additions to enrich the texture of the prose, not substantive rewrites.”

A monograph may accordingly appear carrying forward, uncorrected, demonstrable errors about TWP's founding, ownership, scale, design identity, politics and trajectory — errors first identifiable in the author's 2018 article, pointed out to her in detail, and left standing.

Scholars are entitled to their own interpretations; they are not entitled to their own facts.

Primary evidence is available via the developing TWP on-line Archive. Catalogues, correspondence, and other records will be added to the LSE Archive (with the assistance of Dr Murphy). Anyone consulting the accounts on which Mack relies, along with oral evidence, is invited to check all claims against those records.

Notes: the documentary record

Condensed from the 2026 correspondence, with substantial verbatim excerpts. Full texts are held by Dowrick and will be lodged with the archives above.

Note 1 — Mack's permissions request (2–3 April 2026) and why permission was declined

Mack requested non-exclusive rights, “regardless of the media, territories, and languages”, to the following quotations from the 10 March interview and 24 March document — the complete list as submitted:

- “couldn't initiate enough” [Interview]
- “perhaps I'd like to do a few books on the side for them.” [Interview]

- “I think he saw something in me … he said, 'Look, we're talking about the wrong thing here. You don't want to be doing a few feminist books for Quartet. You want your own publishing house.'” [Interview]
- “something in me said, You've got to say yes to this.'” [Interview]
- “I'm glad I didn't know how hard it would be.” [Interview]
- “it is inescapable that TWP would not have come into existence without Naim's willingness to back an enterprise that would quite soon be (in my view) significantly more challenging than the publishing Virago was doing.” [Email]
- “we used to have incredible loyalty to the Penguin.” [Interview]
- “what I wanted for The Women's Press was that somebody could look at a book … 'I've never heard of this writer, but I trust the iron, or I trust the chord (sic), the iron.'” [Interview]
- “it was incredibly difficult to get anyone to print it [Chesler's *About Men*], And then Naim had to indemnify the printers against anybody calling it pornography…” [Interview]
- “sometimes Naim and I had huge rows.” [Interview]
- “Treading on my toes, sometimes, speaking frankly always, but also prepared to cede some power when my arguments convinced him … He did not misuse his power. Not with me … that he did not need to 'win' every time really stays with me.”
- “He had the grace to back down when I challenged him on any interference with the politics and especially the publishing decisions of TWP.” [Email]
- “I had such a hard time about having a male backer, as though money could just fall from a tree … And trying to make it political, also in its publishing practice, while carrying the responsibility myself for its success or failure.” [Interview]
- On the Book Club's founding: “The decision was initially economic: a smart way to draw on the trust in and loyalty to TWP from readers … I also assumed (correctly) that it would build a

> sense of community that would result in the sale of greater numbers of TWP books, thus immediately benefitting authors." [Email]

Each quotation concerns founding anecdote and colour. No passage was selected from the corrective substance of the 30-page document — the corrections on ownership, scale, the 1991 narrative, the recovery period, or the founding purpose. The selection was patently inadequate to correct the omissions, failures and bias in the intended work; permission was therefore declined, as granting it could have appeared to endorse the work as a whole.

Note 2 — Contemporaneous letters supplied (23–24 March 2026)

Dowrick to Mack, 23 March, sending the first tranche of letters and faxes located in her storeroom:

> *"The letter below (18 July 1991) is just one of many I have found in first search … What they show, plainly, is that all was far from well at TWP prior to Ros's departure. Also, that the revisionist account of why TWP was failing (and losing unsustainable amounts of money) was being vigorously argued - with other versions (whatever the evidence) trivialised or silenced. This has had serious implications for all that's followed, including Simone Murray's work - written so confidently without any enquiries to me … The point that strikes me with such force … is that 1991 was a POSITIVE turning point - not a 'catastrophe'."*

A second email the same day enclosed contemporaneous documents concerning the bullying of Kathy Gale and others who remained loyal to the Press and, under Gale's leadership, returned it to solvency and a further dozen years of publishing with unquestionable feminist legitimacy. Dowrick: "The stresses Kathy was put under were so unnecessary… So much for bloody 'sisterhood'."

Mack acknowledged receipt that evening. She called the material "fascinating!" and "very good to know as background", declined to quote it, and characterised Hemming's and Gale's post-1991 roles as

“enormously difficult”. Dowrick corrected that framing the next morning:

> *“However, and please, please understand this, Mary and Kathy's time was NOT only or not just simply 'enormously difficult'. They achieved a great deal, were significantly more professional in all their dealings with authors and the essential sales/production/marketing external people, and many of the letters/faxes I have attest to a real feeling of excitement, even renaissance … It was during their years from 1991-1996 (?) or perhaps well beyond, that the Press resumed a much steadier profile … I was able to get Allen & Unwin to distribute TWP books in Australia … There were also much, much better rights sales, better sales in NZ, and in general a more positive and less defensive attitude. Mary Hemming was utterly dedicated to the principles of feminist publishing from the time TWP started … Don't forget they inherited a mountain of debt.”*
>
> — Dowrick to Mack, 24 March 2026

Note 3 — The 30-page response (24 March 2026) and Mack's reply

Dowrick's covering email to the 30-page document answering Mack's questions:

> *“This document has taken a huge amount of time and effort but I am confident that it can be backed up with contemporaneous letters/faxes etc - some of which I have sent you in separate emails. You are free to come back to me for clarification where needed. Filling out a richer picture of TWP - and why it existed (and flourished) in a particular time and place - will be important to the WP authors who wrote boldly and bravely, to many, many readers, to the scholars who follow your trail, and to me … A publishing house as brave as The Women's Press could not happen now … All the better then that we remember what women did achieve.”*

Mack's reply of 27 March, in full so far as it concerns the corrective material:

> *“Thank you ever so much for your time and energy in responding to my questions, I very much appreciate your responding in such detail. I'm pretty swamped with work currently, so I'm afraid I won't be able to comment on your draft [intended for the LSE archive] … I'll be back in touch next week to ask for formal permission for any quotes I intend to use. The ms. will be due back in for copy editing a couple of weeks after that.”*

The reply recommended, in place of engagement with the corrections, an online science-fiction encyclopedia entry on the importance of the SF list.

Note 4 — Corrected summary offered to the LSE archive

A corrected copy was prepared by Dowrick for The Women's Press archive at the London School of Economics to replace a ludicrously incorrect summary published at the time on the LSE archive summary of TWP. Mack’s monograph appears to rely heavily on her LSE archive experience.

Note 5 — Corrections to Mack's 2018 article (28 March 2026)

Dowrick sent a detailed critique of Mack's 2018 article, “Weaving Webs, Cutting Wires: Textual Production as Action at Greenham Common”, identifying errors that appear to have travelled — unchecked by peer review reliant on the same sources — into the doctoral thesis and the current proposed monograph. Receipt was confirmed by auto-reply; the substance was never answered. Principal corrections, side by side:

Mack, 2018 article	**Dowrick's correction (28 March 2026)**
“Second only to Virago in terms of its longevity and back-catalogue, the press was founded in 1977 by Stephanie Dowrick and Sybil [sic]	“TWP was never an imprint of Quartet Books! On the contrary. Nor was Sibyl (note name sp.) a 'founder'. You omit Naim Attallah entirely. Yet the Press -

Mack, 2018 article	**Dowrick's correction (28 March 2026)**
Grundberg as an imprint of Quartet books … I estimate their list to include upwards of 500 books."	always intended to be mid-sized and commercially viable - could not have come into existence without his financial backing. Nor could it have existed without a) my formidable publishing experience … b) a clear agreement that the editorial direction of TWP was outside Naim's remit."
"After spending three months alone in the archive, I felt a familiarity with the labor of The Women's Press and some of the ways in which it interacted with other structures and spaces."	"This is painful to read as 'three months alone in the archive' does not appear to have given you anything like a full picture of the earliest and most effective TWP years … who - do you know? - collated the archive and decided what to leave out? … Your dependence on that archive, and what it contained (and left out), has seriously constricted your research."
Greenham publishing analysed without reference to TWP's wider anti-war commitment.	"The Greenham Common publishing activism - so notable then and now - needs to be situated within anti-war work that I then believed … central to any legitimate 'feminist' analysis. And certainly within the context of an existing personal and TWP commitment

Mack, 2018 article	Dowrick's correction (28 March 2026)
	to anti-war activism." (Bertell, Deming, Griffin, Goodison, and the Press's peace publishing from inception.)
"…it is possible that Virago as a larger house might have been able to offer more in the way of advance or initial print run, but this is pure speculation."	"There is no evidence that Virago paid bigger advances or had better distribution in this period. Also, they did NOT privilege or reflect any degree of challenging activism … Hence 'Live issues. Live authors'."
Approving citation of de Lanerolle (1990): a women's-press book "has probably been less shaped and polished to conform to a 'norm'; it has been allowed, perhaps, to be itself."	"What Ros writes there is anathema to me. Not at any time did I believe women's challenging (or brilliant, fascinating, groundbreaking) writing should be less 'polished' … Women AS WOMEN do not need to be patronised or coddled." This quote marks the divergence between de Lanerolle's practice and the editorial standards of the founding and recovery periods.
"Harford and Hopkins, as the book's primary editors, had a lot of agency, and therefore, both enormous amounts of labor and power to make distinctions	"Rosemary, this applies also to you, now: who has total agency in the telling, re-telling; and what narrative emerges from that, to what effect, in your

Mack, 2018 article	Dowrick's correction (28 March 2026)
between integral and surplus material."	writing about The Women's Press, both past and present."
"'Alternative reality,' the term used by the editors … has a suggestively sci-fi quality, reminiscent of feminist utopian fiction emerging at the time."	"I disagree with your conclusion here. 'Alternative realities' seemed possible to civil rightists and women/gay liberation/enviro activists in ways hard now to imagine fully, NOT as the stuff of 'sci-fi' but what could be achieved through the yin and yang of effective analysis and equally effective action."

Dowrick closed: "I very much hope that my careful dialogue with your initial writing on this text will be of positive help to you in your current reassessments." She also asked: "Do you have a source where this early misinformation you drew on can also be corrected?" No answer was received.

Note 6 — Permission declined pending correction (8 April 2026)

Dowrick's response to the permissions request. Key passages:

> *"I am going to have to ask you to do significantly more before I can offer formal permission for anything you are suggesting, thus far. Your permissions list so far gives me little clue as to whether my recent interventions/explanations form any meaningful part of your current backstory … Your permissions requests seem also largely to ignore the detailed 30-page response I took you seriously enough to supply. (You acknowledged receipt.) Also seemingly overlooked are the*

contemporaneous copies of letters I found and sent you, including to Ros. This matters."

"The Women's Press was never envisioned to be a Sheba, or OnlyWomen. It was ALWAYS intended to be a publishing house where excellent writing only would be published, professionally and stylishly. That is exactly what serious writers thoroughly deserve. That was the 'process'!"

"In a later email, you expressed an equally unfounded assumption that 'dozens if not hundreds' of women would have worked for The Women's Press over the years. How you gained this impression, I cannot fathom. There were never more than a startling few at any time because funds would never have allowed it, plus via the Namara Group, much of the production, all of the sales repping, all of the accounting and royalty reporting etc, was done by Quartet Books."

"With sadness as well as frustration, I have been struck by how similar the remarks are about the founding and financial sustaining of the Press from Simone Murray, Catherine Riley, and yourself. What/who was the primary source? Also, the same narratives - WITHOUT EVIDENCE, or none yet produced?? - that Naim wilfully refused a half million pounds offer from Ros in 1991 to 'buy' the Press (the stock? the debts? ongoing contracts?), and that his editorial 'complaint' - from a Palestinian - was that Ros and others were simply publishing 'too many Third World writers'."

"Most critically, to clarify why The Women's Press was founded, how it was possible to do so in that rare historical moment … and FOR WHAT? For what, Rosemary? NOT to be a sheltered workshop or some kind of charity. Instead, the goal, the reason for existence was to publish those brilliant, brave women whose names I have shared repeatedly. And to publish them totally professionally."

The email detailed the professional expertise and connections behind the founding — the negotiation with Bob Gottlieb of Knopf over Lisa Alther's *Original Sins*, whose shared Penguin paperback advance funded the Press and later prompted the Book Club's creation; the early acquisition of Alice Walker "when other, far larger publishing houses failed to recognise there would be sufficient readers for a black American writer" — and closed with an open offer: "Please be very clear that I am more than willing to read as many chapters/sections you have where you believe a more complete story has already been realised. Or will now be."

It also identified Catherine Riley's account[12] of the founding — Attallah founding the Press and "installing" Dowrick "to run the business" — as "insulting, untrue, and a quite shocking misstep for a scholar."

Note 7 — Final exchange (13–15 April 2026)

On 13 April, with no substantive response received, Dowrick restated the outstanding issues in six numbered points, cc'ing Professors Michèle Barrett and Helen Taylor — both of whom had agreed to speak with Mack — and her British colleague:

- The prior senior publishing experience (NEL, Triad, connections to Chatto/Hogarth, New York publishing) that made it possible to commission, edit and publish high-level books from February 1978 — and the stark lack of such experience among later staff, which "showed itself dramatically from 1985-1990."
- The financing and business arrangements of The Women's Press Ltd — "perhaps misunderstood by Ros, then misrepresented, also by those who have spoken since on her behalf." Dowrick remained a director and co-owner throughout, and from 1991 replaced Attallah as Chairperson.
- The near-disastrous downturn in income versus outgoings from 1985–1990 ("a DOZEN staff by 1990!!").

[12] Catherine Riley, *The Virago Story*, Berghahn Books, 2018

- The repeated, unevidenced buyout-and-“Third World writers” narrative (Dowrick's contemporaneous letter to the Guardian re-attached).
- The misreported finances of TWP and the Book Club — the latter founded by Dowrick solely to support the Press, and a loss-maker only under later direction. Supporting material, including auditor's reports, to be deposited with the LSE archive.
- The out-of-control costs and expenditure under de Lanerolle, with too many books published, too few books capable of generating *viable sales*, documented in Dowrick's frequent contemporaneous requests for reports and *authors' complaints of inaction*.

The same email enclosed the February 1991 **British Book News** interview discovered that day (analysed in Section 5), and closed:

“*You are proposing, Rosemary, to call your forthcoming book Reading With Care. I have done my best to urge you to interrogate your conditioned assumptions with care. You are short of time. I am, too*.”

On 15 April, responding to Mack's continued non-engagement, Dowrick wrote:

> *“It is incomprehensible to me that you took my email below - plus the lengthy, detailed answers previously supplied to your questions, and my informed corrections to your 2018 writing - as a signal to return to the same INCOMPLETE understanding of The Women's Press … The very opposite is true. I want nothing more than for you to include more of what I have given you, to check your familiar assumptions with me, to come up with a richer, truer text than you would otherwise have done … I have made myself, my experiences, my records fully available to you. It ought to be a serious researcher's dream. … There is still time for you to round out the story and give added credibility to your commentary. I most sincerely hope you will do that. I remain available for more positive exchanges.”*

Mack's reply of 15 April 2026, in full:

"Dear Stephanie, Duly noted, be assured that I will not quote from the interview or the email in my book. As stated, any changes to the manuscript would have been additions to enrich the texture of the prose, not substantive rewrites. As stated, I stand behind my approach, its value, and its contributions to scholarship. You have made your position quite clear. I will not be debating this matter. My records of the Alther correspondence happen to be from later on, and do not include letters from you. I remain willing to take time to locate and redact letters of yours from up to two files, so if you would be so good as to choose another file or two, I will do that work when I have time. Once I have heard back from you on which files you would like and sent you the images you request, I consider this correspondence to be concluded. Regards, Rosemary"

Correspondence to Dowrick from Gisela Fosado at Duke UP:

(16 April 2026).
Dear Stephanie,

Thank you for reaching out to us about this matter. Our Director, Dean Smith, our Executive Editor, Courtney Berger, and I have been closely tracking this matter for the past two months. The author has shared with us all of her correspondence with you (including your responses), and we have given her time to make any necessary changes.

Best wishes,
Gisela

(18 April 2026)
Hi Stephanie,

I'm taking some time off this week, but I'll be sure to respond early next week on Monday or Tuesday.

Have a wonderful weekend,
Gisela

(21 April 2026).

Thank you for sending additional information, Stephanie. We will continue to closely monitor this matter, and I will follow up if any questions arise along the way. The history of The Women's Press is impressive, and it is clear that there is room for more than one book on the work that you and others at the Press accomplished.

All the best,
Gisela

(end)