David Dugdale 1923-2010

13 May 2010 by Jancis Robinson

David Dugdale was a thoroughly benign, if low-key, force in the UK wine trade. He was the eminence grise behind the fine-wine merchant OW Loeb, while running a very successful family business from his base in north Yorkshire. He and his lively and knowledgeable wife Kate invited us to visit them several times and it was always extremely tempting, not least because of the fame of their cellar.

We did dine together on many an occasion. I remember them musing in the 1990s that they were currently working their way through their Chablis of the 1920s. As David's health declined and he was confined to a wheelchair, we were more likely to see them at the opera than at the dinner table. They were long-term patrons of the arts, particularly classical music. The portrait of David by Martin Rose shown here was commissioned by the Lindsey Quartet. The appreciation below was written by Chris Davey of OW Loeb, who laments the fact that it is incomplete and does not mention, for example, his prowess as a serious squash player.

It is with great sadness that we announce the death last month of our great friend and mentor, David Dugdale. David was truly one of the great 'amateur' wine enthusiasts, with one of the sharpest palates, as well as one of the widest and deepest wine knowledge banks around. I put inverted commas around the word amateur because, despite never working full time in the wine trade, he was for over 40 years the guiding light of OWLoeb.

David's first contact with OWL was as a customer in 1952, when he was attracted by an advertisement placed by Otto Loeb (a rarity indeed!) in André Simon's Wine & Food Society magazine, extolling the virtues of fine German Riesling. With his intense interest in wine, and serious intellect and thirst for knowledge, David soon became a friend of the company, and the two men then at the helm, Otto Loeb and Anthony Goldthorp.

By 1961 (the year that David 'discovered' Château Rayas for us) Otto and Anthony had invited David to join the board of OWLoeb & Co. Ltd. David and Anthony then set about identifying and together winning for OWL some of the very greatest of French wine producers from all regions, many of whom still feature in our offering today. Louis Michel of Chablis, Armand Rousseau of Gevrey and Henri Gouges of Nuits were among the first, swiftly followed by Foreau of Vouvray, the Marquis d'Angerville of Volnay, Ramonet of Chassagne, Etienne Sauzet of Puligny, Michel Niellon of Chassagne, Paul Jaboulet of Tain l'Hermitage, Faller/Domaine Weinbach of Kaysersberg and at the end of the 1960s, on a tip off from Charles Rousseau, the young Jacques Seysses of Domaine Dujac, Morey-St. Denis - every bottled vintage of whose wonderful wines we have shipped (Jacques did not bottle his inaugural vintage - 1968 - as it was not a year when Bacchus smiled on Burgundy).

At the same time as seeking out these great French producers, David and Anthony joined with Otto in maintaining and developing our long-standing relationships with the great and the good of Germany (some of whom Otto's father and grandfather had dealt with); the likes of J.J. Prüm, von Schubert, Egon Müller, H Thanisch, von Kesselstatt and more. It was David's relentless search for the very best of everything which has provided us today with such a magical list of producers to enjoy.

The early 1970s were not kind to the wine trade. With the collapse of the Bordeaux market, many UK merchants found themselves short of cash, and the crash of the pound (*plus ça change*…) meant margins were squeezed to nothing. Then, in 1974, Otto Loeb died in his beloved home city of Trier. OWL needed stability, and David provided it by buying the company in 1976. David's intention was never to make money from this transaction, but to support and give life to a company which he loved, and the many suppliers whom he equally loved.

David and Anthony continued their annual trips to France and Germany, with wine tastings interspersed with visits to some of the finest restaurants of each region. Then, in 1988, Anthony Goldthorp, the much-loved and widely respected managing director of OWL, himself died very suddenly one evening on the train home from Waterloo Station. However, David continued undaunted, with the support of the office team in London.

By the mid 1990s David, now in his seventies, decided that it was time for him to think about the future of OWL. Again, he had no desire to profit from the company's privileged position as prime importer of so many great producers. Despite receiving many offers from other wine companies, David was determined to do all he possibly could to ensure that the

company remained independent, and in the hands of enthusiasts who would love and nurture it as he had done. The company was sold to the present management on terms that were, shall we say, 'beneficial'.

David's impish sense of humour, great knowledge and incredible generosity - at the table and in business - will be greatly missed by us all.

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