



CHAMPAGNE
POL ROGER

**118 YEARS LATER,
THE DREAM COMES TRUE.**

February 23th 1900 – The collapse

Pol Roger began his work as a négociant at the young age of 18. He made his first sale of wine in January 1849 before moving to Epernay in 1851.

Maurice and Georges took over from their father in 1899. Nothing could have prepared them for the catastrophe they would have to face on February 23rd 1900, following a period of extremely cold and damp weather.

The account in *Le Vigneron Champenois* reported: « ...at about two o'clock in the morning, a dull rumble similar to the sound of thunder, awoke Maurice Roger and his chef de cave, M. Leclerc, although it did not give them any concern. Two hours later they were alarmed by a much louder noise. They hurriedly got up to check and much to their amazement, they caught sight of the catastrophe which had caused the noise. Part of the immense celliers had caved in, causing the adjoining buildings to collapse, and destroying full barrels and bottles of wine and equipment stored there. When the workers arrived a few hours later, the disaster was complete. The ground had caved in at the centre of the new caves, demolishing the walls, causing fissures in the neighbouring walls, cracking the road surface in rue Henri le Large and rue Godart-Roger and making all the ground in the street cave into a depth of four meters. »

Fortunately, as the accident occurred in the middle of the night, no workers were present, so the damage, much to everyone's relief, was purely material. Still, the loss was huge amounting to 500 casks of wine and 1.5 million bottles.

Maurice and Georges hoped that more wine might be retrieved by tunneling into the damaged cellars to determine what stock, if any, might be removed from the rubble. When another cave-in occurred on March 20 nearby on property owned by the Godart-Roger family, the prospects for rebuilding were less auspicious and so the tunneling plan came to an end.

Instead, the brothers bought a large property with caves adjacent to their own on rue du Commerce (now renamed Avenue de Champagne), on and under which they built, beginning in late 1900, more extensive premises.

January 15th 2018 – The treasure

Pol Roger are in the process of building a new packaging facility above the site of the historic cellars ; part of which collapsed in 1900. They have dug underground until one drilling session ended up finding a void. On the 15th January, when exploring this cavity, they, at first, found a collection of broken glass before unveiling an intact bottle.

Dominic Petit, the outgoing cellar master, together with his successor, Damien Cambres, could not resist widening the cavity further. Hence, in the next few days, six and then nineteen more bottles were discovered.

The wines are clear, the levels are correct and the corks are depressed. Even if one cannot be sure what vintage they are from (these bottles could be as old as 1887 and as young as 1898), one knows these bottles are still on their lees and will have to be hand riddled and disgorged before being tasted.

The investigation has now been put on standby because the chalk is currently saturated with water. The House has appointed a specialised team to ensure the search is safe. Only then will future drilling be carried out and perhaps unearth further underground treasures.

One can only imagine the joy of Maurice and George's grandchildren and great-grandchildren when fulfilling the dream of finding the bottles back. As for Dominique and Damien, what better farewell present and welcome gift could they ask for?