Archaeological Fieldwork in Estonia 2023, 271–278

Archaeological research of Peeterristi church and churchyard

Martin Malve

Tartu Ülikool, ajaloo ja arheoloogia instituut, arheoloogia osakond (University of Tartu, Institute of History and Archaeology, Department of Archaeology), Jakobi 2, 51005 Tartu, Estonia; martin.malve@ut.ee
Tartu Ülikool, genoomika instituut (University of Tartu, Institute of Genomics), Riia 23b, 51010 Tartu, Estonia

Monika Reppo

OÜ Arheograator, Raekoja plats 11–16, 51004 Tartu, Estonia
Tallinna Ülikool, arheoloogia teaduskogu (Tallinn University, Archaeological Research Collection), Rüütli 10, 10130 Tallinn, Estonia

INTRODUCTION

In July 2023, fieldwork was carried out to locate the remains of Peeterristi church, chapel, and churchyard in an area which is planned to be developed as part of the reconstruction of the Tallinn–Narva highway in Peeterristi village, Ida-Viru County. There are no standing structures or visible remains, previous research is scarce and incomplete, and the site is not a scheduled monument which complicated research. Based on the results of a desk-based assessment of the region conducted in early 2023 (Reppo & Kriiska 2023), an area encompassing 9,000 m² was systematically surveyed with metal detectors[1] and 21 test pits and 5 trenches were dug to identify the location and state of preservation of the building remains and the associated burials (Fig. 1; Malve *et al.* 2023). This article introduces both the results of the desk-based assessment and archaeological fieldwork. During fieldwork, building rubble and human remains were discovered from the area. One *in situ* skeleton was exhumed to allow scientific analysis.

[1] Conducted by Aleksandr Kotkin and Aleksandr Smirnov.

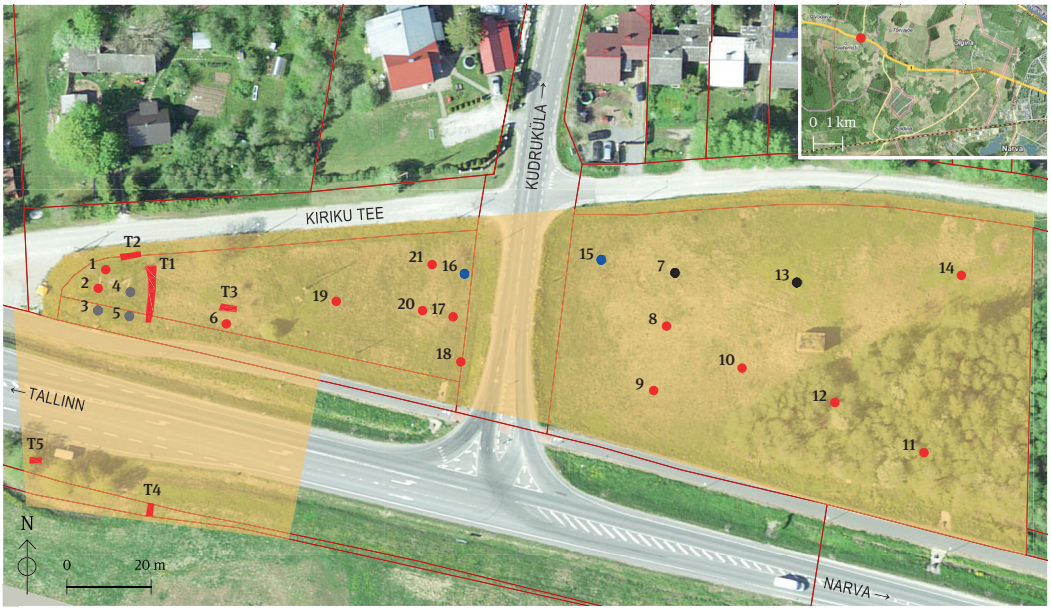

Fig. 1. *The studied area (yellow) – test pits and trenches (T) in red, test pits with demolition rubble in grey, with commingled skeletal remains in black and with* in situ *burials in blue.*
Jn 1. *Uuritud ala (kollane) – prooviaugud ja tranšeed (T) punasega, lammutusrusuga prooviaugud halliga, segatud luudega mustaga ja* in situ *matustega sinisega.*
Map / Kaart: Monika Reppo

PEETERRISTI CHURCH AND CHURCHYARD

Peeterristi village was named after the patron saint of Vaivara filial church (KNR, 472) – St Peter, one of the twelve apostles and patron saint of fishermen, netmakers, shipbuilders, and locksmiths. According to folklore, the church was either named after a castaway Dutch captain who built a chapel here or a commander who died in 1601 in the Polish–Swedish war (H II 36, 409 (2); Tõnurist 1933, 3). Further versions claim it was named after Peter the Great – referring either to his alleged shipwreck in Leekova marsh (EKI KN, 2061633) or after a chapel which was built in the location where he made the sign of the cross after crossing through the marsh during the Great Northern War (EKI KN, 2061629). Despite these elaborate backstories, the village was officially named only in 1922 (KNR, 472).

There have been at least three churches in Peeterristi – the old Hermann church (Peter's chapel), the old Peeterristi church, and the new Peeterristi church (Ederma & Jaik 1939, 84). The location and date of the old Hermann church is unknown, but it was likely a wooden church near the later churches which may have seated around 50 people (Tõnurist 1933, 3). In the first half of the 17th century, the old Peeterristi (St Petri) church was built to replace the old Hermann church. The old Peeterristi church served as a filial church to both Narva (1638–1651, 1668) and Vaivara (Ederma & Jaik 1939, 84). According to pastor and Baltic German regional historian August Wilhelm Hupel, this was a small stone church without a steeple (Hupel 1782, 470). It is unclear when the church fell into disuse, but the ruins of this stone building were apparently still visible in 1939 (Ederma & Jaik 1939, 84). From 1808–1809, the new Peeterristi church was built at the initiative of Dorothea von Arpshoven (née Gnospelius; 1764–1841) in honour of her husband *Freiherr* Karl Georg von Arpshoven (1742–1804).

Dorothea's great-great-uncle Jacob Gnospelius (1646–1703) had been the pastor of Vaivara congregation (Luhamets 2022; 2024) – Peeterristi and Vaivara shared a pastor since the 17th century (Ederma & Jaik 1939, 84) so Jacob also conducted religious worship here.

The classicist stone church seated 400 and had a steeple with a belfry and a domed spire. The building was surrounded by a low limestone boundary wall. As noted above, the ruins of the old Peeterristi church were still visible in 1939, which indicates the new church was not built right on top of the earlier church. It has been claimed that the new church was built on either the site of a derelict chapel (Vaivara vallavalitsus 2008) or some other wooden structures (Kroon 2018, 38). At the same time, most sources note that a wooden chapel by the church continued to be used as a house of prayer (e.g. Luhamets 2022). Historical memory also surmises that the wooden chapel was either 'significantly older' (EKI KN, 2061633) than the church or even the original wooden chapel *resp.* church (EKLA f 200, m 18:1, 9/11 (5)). This undated wooden chapel stood at the northern side of the churchyard which was located by the intersection northeast of the new Peeterristi church. All three – the church, churchyard, and chapel can be seen in an aerial photo taken in 1934 (Fig. 2), but no ruins can be identified at first glance.

The churchyard and chapel were surrounded by a boundary wall or fence as seen in Figure 2. In 1771–1772, when the ordinance by Catherine the Great and the Senate regarding burials in and around churches in settlement centres was issued (Polnoye 1830, 409, 500, 691), burials around the chapel were not phased out at Peeterristi. The oldest and currently only known preserved gravestone from Peeterristi churchyard for Georg Schonberg (1731–1795) was dug up and erected as a monument to the site in 2008 (Korsten 2008, 3). Burials continued around the chapel in the 1930s (Tõnurist 1933, 3) with at least one burial occurring during World War II (EKI KN, 2061633) although Vaivara pastor Tomberg[2] had convinced Baron Arpshoven to donate a plot of land for the new cemetery in Sininõmme, 3.7 km northeast of the church (*ibid.*, 3). After the war, Sininõmme was taken into use and there is a memorial plaque for Peeterristi church at the cemetery.

Fig. 2. *Peeterristi church (centre front), churchyard and chapel (right, by the intersection) in 1934.*
Jn 2. *Peeterristi kirik (ees keskel), kalmistu ja kabel (paremal ristmiku vastas) 1934. aastal.*
Photo / Foto: Voldemar Andersen, EFA.66.4.19126

The new Peeterristi church was blown up on the evening of Pentecost Saturday in May 1944 to avoid it being used as a target by Soviet troops (Luhamets 2022). The chapel was also destroyed during World War II. The site of the church was still visible in 1953 (Korsten 2008, 3). Tallinn–Narva road was reconstructed to pass through the site of the new Peeterristi church, another road passed partially through the churchyard and chapel. An old linden tree that grew around 4–6 metres from the entrance of the chapel as well as the grave marker for the burial that occurred during World War II were still standing in 1968 (EKI KN, 2061621, 2061633). Today, the only witness to the site's long history is the monument erected in 2008 by a roadside parking lot.

[2] Likely Christoph Dietrich Georg Tomberg (1845–1902) who served at Vaivara from 1870 until his death.

RESULTS OF THE FIELDWORK

The study of a church and cemetery which were still in active use in the 19th–20th centuries is rare in Estonian archaeology. These 'modern' sites have rarely fallen into disuse and their redevelopment is uncommon. Only a few cemetery structures of this period have been studied in the past. For example, these include the Teller chapel in Tartu on Raadi cemetery (Kivirüüt & Malve 2018) or the von Adelbergs' crypt in Viru-Nigula churchyard (Johanson *et al*. 2006). In the case of Peeterristi, there are no visible signs above ground to indicate that there was a church and churchyard here a mere 80 years ago.

To identify the location of the church and churchyard, 21 test pits were dug by hand; the five trenches were dug using an excavator. The foundation or remains of the church were not discovered during this preliminary study, but the metre-thick layer of limestone rubble, brick, and roof tile fragments found from test pits 3, 4, and 5 on the northern side of the modern-day highway most likely originates from the demolition of the church. These test pits were in the western part of the studied area. Two fragments of a brass chandelier were collected from trench 1 (Fig. 3: 1). Based on oral history, historical maps, and the measurements taken according to these maps, it is highly likely that the west-east oriented Tallinn–Narva highway is built straight across the ruins of the church. This is also indicated by a large hewn fieldstone in the highway ditch on the southern side of the highway on the western side of the bus stop by trench 5 (Fig. 1). The stone was potentially a part of the former Peeterristi church.

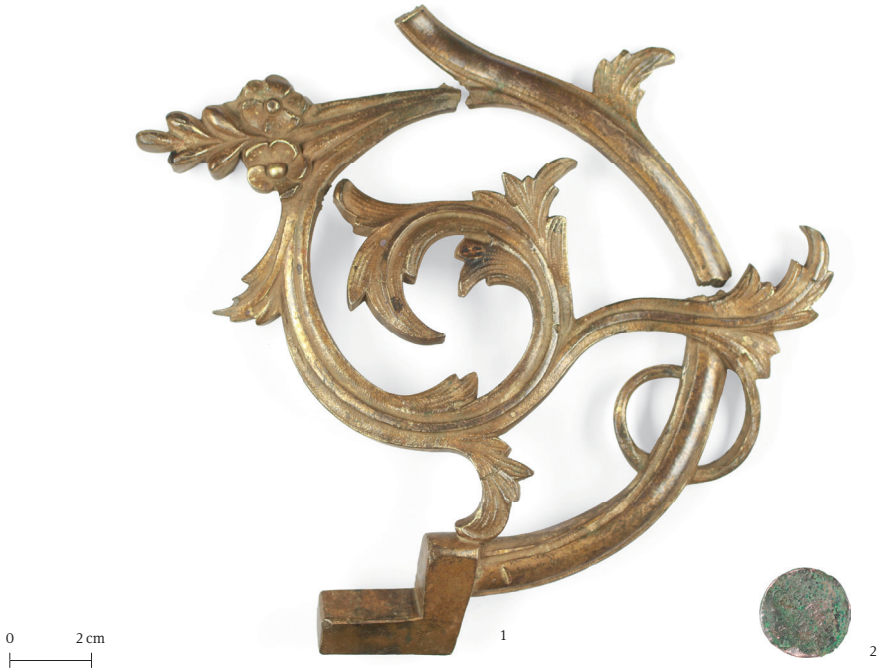

Fig. 3. *Objects discovered from Peeterristi church and churchyard: 1 – brass chandelier fragments from the potential demolition rubble of the church, 2 – an 1831 kopeck from the* in situ *burial.*
Jn 3. *Peeterristi kiriku ja kalmistu alalt avastatud esemed: 1 – võimalikust kirikurusust leitud messingust lühtrikatked, 2 – 1831. aasta kopikas* in situ *matusest.*
(AI 8795: 2, 3, 5.)
Photo / Foto: Martin Malve

Remains of the churchyard were discovered by the Peeterristi–Kudruküla carriageway and Kiriku road intersection in the centre of the surveyed area in the form of commingled remains and two *in situ* burials in test pits 7, 13, 15, and 16 (Fig. 1). The test pits were located on the eastern and western side of the north-south oriented Peeterristi–Kudruküla carriageway. The west-east oriented Kiriku road (Eng. church road) was a part of the old Tallinn–Narva highway but because the latter was reconstructed in the second half of the 20th century and moved southwards, it became a by-road. For a couple of hundred metres at the eastern end of Kiriku road, the cobblestone pavement of the former main road is preserved. The extension of the carriageway leading to Kudruküla from the Tallinn–Narva highway was built in the 1980s across Peeterristi churchyard. It is likely that the churchyard is preserved under this road as the road was built on a high embankment. The soil for the embankment was gathered by stripping the topsoil of the churchyard and the nearby fields. According to locals, this extension to the Peeterristi–Kudruküla carriageway also overlays the chapel ruins (see Malve *et al.* 2023, 7).

THE BURIALS

A complete burial found from test pit 16 was exhumed (Fig. 4). The burial was only 36 cm below the modern-day ground level. As mentioned above, the topsoil has been moved, levelled, and partially removed when the extension of the Kudruküla carriageway was built. According to the locals, this happened in the first half of the 1980s. The fill of the grave included a few commingled remains which indicates that over burial was practiced at Peeterristi. The deceased had been interred supine, west-east oriented (270°) in a wooden coffin held together by iron nails. As the deceased had decomposed in a coffin, many of the bones had moved from their original locations. There was a coin under the right humeral head at the bottom of the coffin – an 1831 kopeck minted during the rule of Nicholas I of Russia (Fig. 3: 2). The *in situ* burial from test pit 15 was not exhumed nor excavated but its location was documented. Wooden coffin remains were noted here as well – the coffin had been painted blue. A sample was taken from the wood of both coffins.

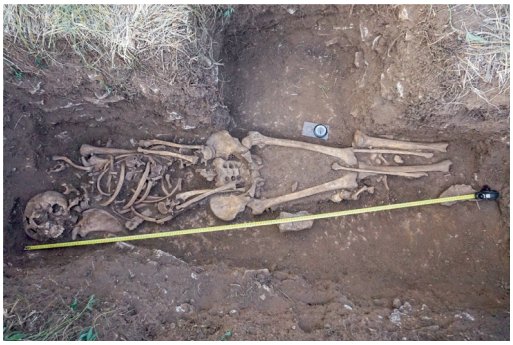

Fig. 4. *The* in situ *19th-century adult male burial discovered from Peeterristi churchyard.*
Jn 4. *Peeterristi kalmistult avastatud* in situ *täiskasvanud mehe matus 19. sajandist.*
Photo / Foto: Martin Malve

Analysis of the human remains

The skeleton from test pit 16 and other commingled skeletal remains underwent osteological analysis.[3] The exhumed skeleton was a male who was around 30–45 years of age at the time of death. Based on the maximum length of the left femur, the height of the man was calculated

[3] The sex of the adults was estimated using cranium and pelvic dimorphism (Buikstra & Ubelaker 1994, 16–20), also the maximum length of the long bones (Garmus & Jankauskas 1993, 5–23), and the maximum lengths of the bones of the foot (talus and calcaneus) were used (Garmus 1996, 28). The age at death of the adults was determined by the morphology of the pubic symphysis (Todd 1920, 285–334; Brooks & Suchey 1990, 227–238), tooth wear stages (Brothwell 1981, 72) and changes in the joints (Ubelaker 1989, 84–87). Sex determination for subadults was not attempted because clear sexual traits develop only in the end of puberty (Buikstra & Ubelaker 1994, 16). The age of the subadults was analysed by the development of the bones and epiphyseal fusion (Schaefer *et al.* 2009). Pathological conditions were identified based on Buikstra (2019) and Roberts & Manchester (2012). Stature was calculated according to the formula of Trotter and Gleser (Trotter 1970), using measurements of the right femur.

to have been 174,9±3,27 cm. The bones were fractured from the weight of the grave fill as it contained limestone, but the general preservation of the bones was good. There was minimal erosion and damage on the surface of the bones. The skeleton was preserved almost completely except for a couple of the smallest skeletal parts.

28 of the man's permanent teeth had erupted and were preserved. Slight dental calculus was noted on both the maxillary and mandibular teeth. On the first incisors of the maxillary and on the mandibular canines, up to three dental horizontal stress lines were identified. The right mandibular first molar was affected by caries which had likely caused a periapical lesion.

Spondylarthrosis, the articular wear on the upper and lower surface of the II and III cervical vertebrae was noted alongside changes (osteophytes) on the VI and X–XII thoracic vertebrae (spondylosis) continuous with ageing or physical stress. Herniated intervertebral discs (Schmorl's nodes) were identified, likely due to repeated physical exertion in the VI and VIII–XII thoracic and I lumbar vertebrae. Over tension of the spinal column was also indicated by vertebral body compressions of the X–XII thoracic vertebrae. Finally, sternal foramen was identified as a genetic variation.

Commingled remains

A total of 66 bones or bone fragments were found from four test pits. There was a lot of damage on the bones caused by earthworks in the area, and the outer surface of many of the bones was eroded. Adult skeletal remains were mainly identified among the commingled remains, but skeletal fragments of non-adults, including small children and babies were also found. Schmorl's nodes, osteoarthritis, and spondylosis were detected on the commingled skeletal remains of adults.

CONCLUSION

During archaeological fieldwork in Peeterristi, which followed a desk-based assessment, 21 test pits and 5 trenches were dug and an area of 9,000 m² was surveyed using a metal detector to identify whether and to what extent Peeterristi church, chapel, and churchyard ruins are preserved. Neither the church nor the chapel ruins could be located, however, a thick layer of demolition rubble and fragments of a brass chandelier were found on the northern side of the highway. It can be concluded that the church was likely at the western end of the surveyed area underneath the Tallinn–Narva highway embankment. The churchyard was originally north-east of the church and now lies beneath Kiriku road and Peeterristi–Kudruküla carriageway. Commingled remains and two *in situ* burials were found both on the western and eastern sides of the intersection of these roads in four test pits. A male burial from the mid-19th or second half of the 19th century was exhumed. The skull lay just 36 cm beneath the modern-day ground level. The location of the graves and commingled remains coupled with the low depth of the graves indicates that archaeological excavations will be necessary in the case of redevelopment of the Tallinn–Narva highway.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We want to thank everyone who participated in the excavation and post-excavation processes. This paper was supported by the Estonian Research Council (project nos. PRG29, PRG1027, PRG1931 & PRG2026) and OÜ Arheograator.

REFERENCES

Brooks, S. & Suchey, J. M. 1990. Skeletal age determination based on the *os pubis*: A comparison of the Acsádi-Nemeskéri and Suchey-Brooks methods. – Human Evolution, 5, 227–238.

Brothwell, D. R. 1981. Digging up Bones. New York.

Buikstra, J. E. & Ubelaker, D. H. (eds) 1994. Standards for Data Collection from Human Skeletal Remains. *Arkansas Archeological Survey Research Series, no. 44*. Arkansas.

Buikstra, J. E. (ed.) 2019. Ortner's identification of pathological conditions in human skeletal remains. Third edition. London.

EKI KN Varep = Endel Varep's personal place names archive at the Institute of the Estonian Language, Eesti Keele Instituudi kohanimekartoteek veebis, https://www.eki.ee/kohanimed, (*last accessed 13.03.2024*).

EKLA f 200, m 18:1, 9/11 (5) < Vaivara khk. – Rudolf Põldmäe (1931). (*Manuscript in EKM*.)

Ederma, B. & Jaik, A. (eds) 1939. Eesti Evangeeliumi Luteriusu kirikud. Tartu.

Garmus, A. 1996. Lithuanian Forensic Osteology. Vilnius.

Garmus, A. & Jankauskas, R. 1993. Methods of person's identification from the skeleton in Lithuania. – Medicina Legalis Baltica, 3–4, 5–23.

H II 36, 409 (2) < Vaivara khk, Repniku - D. Torpan. (*Manuscript in EKM*.)

Hupel, A. W. 1782. Topographische Nachrichten von Lief- und Ehstland. Dritter und letzter Band. Riga.

Johanson, K., Jonuks, T. & Limbo-Simovart, J. 2006. The burial of the von Adlerbergs of Viru-Nigula in the context of the 19th century. – Folklore, 32, 197–227.

Kivirüüt, A. & Malve, M. 2018. Skeletid meie jalge all: kalmistute kaevamisest täna ja homme. – Muinsuskaitse aastaraamat, 2017, 80–82.

KNR = Eesti kohanimeraamat. Ed. by P. Päll & M. Kallasmaa. Tallinn, 2016.

Korsten, K. 2008. Peeterristil avati mälestuskivi hävitatud kirikule. – Põhjarannik, 23.09.2008, 3.

Kroon, K. 2018. Ülevaade Vaivara ja Narva ajaloost. – Vana kannel XII. Vaivara ja Narva regilaulud. Ed. by R. Mirov, K. Labi & I. Rüütel. Tartu, 13–46.

Luhamets, K. 2022. Koguduse lugu: Vaivara. – *Pereraadio*, 10.11.2022. https://e-kirik.eelk.ee/2022/koguduse-lugu-vaivara/ (*last accessed 13.03.2024*).

Luhamets, K. 2024. Koguduse lugu. Tartu.

Malve, M., Kriiska, A. & Reppo, M. 2023. Aruanne arheoloogilistest uuringutest Peeterristi kiriku ja kalmistu asemel 10. kuni 14. juuli 2023. Tartu. *(Manuscript in MA.)*

Polnoye 1830 = Полное собраніе законовъ Россійской имперіи съ 1649 года. Томъ XIX. 1770–1774. Санктпетербург.

Roberts, C. & Manchester, K. 2012. The Archaeology of Disease. Third Edition. Cornell.

Reppo, M. & Kriiska, A. 2023. Olemasolevate ja võimalike muististe ja mälestiste kaardistamine ning järgmiste projekteerimisetappide tegevuskava kavandatava Tallinn–Narva riigitee Sillamäe–Narva teelõigul (187,3–209,7 km). Eksperdihinnang. Tartu. (*Manuscript in MA*.)

Schaefer, M., Black, S. & Scheuer, L. 2009. Juvenile Osteology. A Laboratory and Field Manual. Amsterdam.

Todd, T. W. 1920. Age changes in the pubic bone. I: The male white pubis. – American Journal of Physical Anthropology, 3: 3, 285–334.

Tõnurist, A. 1933. Möödunud aegadelt. Narwa lähedal asuwatest muinsustest. – Viru Hääl, 5.11.1933, 3.

Trotter, M. 1970. Estimation of suture from intact long bones. – Personal Identification in Mass Disasters. Washington, 71–83.

Ubelaker, D. H. 1989. Human Skeletal Remains. Excavation, Analysis, Interpretation. *Manuals of Archaeology, 2*. Second edition. Washington.

Vaivara vallavalitsus 2008. Mälestustseremoonia kunagisele Peeterristi kirikule. – Uudised, 10.09.2008. http://www.vaivara.ee/ctrl/ee/Uudis/vaata/1446759d8d01bbaab82a/2293 (*last accessed 13.03.2024*.)

PEETERRISTI KIRIKU JA KIRIKAIA ARHEOLOOGILISED UURINGUD

Martin Malve ja Monika Reppo

Tallinna–Narva maantee tulevaste rekonstrueerimistööde tõttu tehti Peeterristi kiriku (1808–1944) ja kirikaia ning kabeli asukohal eeluuringuid. 2023. a algul toimus esmalt arhiiviuuring, mille tulemuste põhjal järgnesid juulis 2023 väliuuringud. Selleks kaevati käsitsi 21 prooviauku, ekskavaatoriga tehti viis tranšeed ning metalliotsijaga käidi läbi 9000 m² suurune ala (jn 1). Kuigi kirik, kabel ja surnuaed olid 20. sajandi I poolel aktiivses kasutuses (jn 2) ning viimased matused toimusid Teise maailmasõja ajal, ei õnnestunud tuvastada kiriku ja kabeli vundamenti ega ka aset. Uuringuala lääneosas asunud prooviaukudest 3, 4 ja 5 ja tranšeest 1, mis asusid maantee põhjaküljel, leiti tõenäoliselt kiriku lammutamisega seotud meetripaksune rusukiht, mis sisaldas paekive, telliseid ning katusekive. Samalt alalt saadi metalliotsijaga messingist lühtrijäänuseid (jn 3: 1).

Kalmistuga seotud kultuurkihti avastati põhja-lõunasuunalise Peeterristi–Kudruküla tee ja ida-läänesuunalise Kiriku tee ristmiku lähedal Peeterristi–

Kudruküla tee mõlemal küljel. Prooviaukudest 7, 13, 15 ja 16 leiti nii segatud inimluid kui ka kaks *in situ* säilinud matust. Üks 19. sajandi keskpaiga või teise poole täiskasvanud mehe matus puhastati välja (jn 4). Kolju jäi vaid 36 cm sügavusele olemasolevast maapinnatasemest. Matuse parema õlavarreluupea alt saadi kirstu põhjast 1831. aasta kopikas (jn 3: 2). Osteoloogilise analüüsi tulemusel selgus, et maetu oli 30–45aastane mees, kelle luudel on jälgi spondüloartroosist, spondüloosist, rinnalülide lülikehade kompressioonist ning tal esinesid lülivaheketta songad. Patoloogiad on tingitud ealistest muudatustest ja suurest füüsilisest koormusest eluajal. Teist *in situ* säilinud matust välja ei puhastatud, kuid selle siniseks värvitud kirstupuidust võeti proov.

Tööde tulemusel selgus, et kuigi kirikust kirdesse jäänud kalmistule on 20. sajandi II poolel kalmistu ja ümberkaudsete põldude pinnast kokku ajades rajatud teetamm ning nii kiriku, kabeli kui ka kalmistu asemetest üle ehitatud maantee ja tee, on prooviaukude põhjal puutumatut kalmistupinnast säilinud ning esineb *in situ* matuseid, mis jäävad vähem kui 40 cm sügavusele olemasolevast maapinnast. See tähendab, et teede rekonstrueerimisel on arheoloogilised uuringud tulevikus vältimatud.