



# Archaeological rescue investigations on Vaabina manor site

Heiki Valk

*Tartu Ülikool, ajaloo ja arheoloogia instituut, arheoloogia osakond* (University of Tartu, Institute of History and Archaeology, Department of Archaeology), Jakobi 2, 51005 Tartu, Estonia; heiki.valk@ut.ee

## INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2020 archaeological monitoring was performed by the University of Tartu in the historical manor centre of Vaabina (in German *Uelzen*, *Yltzen*, *Fabin*), Urvaste parish, in connection with the reconstruction of Antsla–Vaabina road. The work was necessary because of a medieval castle site that is registered in the historical Vaabina manor centre. The castle site is listed as architectural monument (no 14121 in the National Register of Cultural Monuments), although its exact location is unknown.

## THE MANOR OF VAABINA: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The manor of Vaabina (Hermann 1973; Hein 2016, 125–126) was first noted as belonging to the Tiesenhausen family in 1522 when it was inherited from Fromhold von Tiesenhausen to his son Fabian who owned the domain until the Livonian War (1558–1583). The Estonian toponym Vaabina is considered to originate from his name. The castle of Vaabina is first mentioned in the list of fortified sites of Tartu prince-bishopric in 1555: *nobilium Episcopatus Dorpatens arcis: Rannen, Congtal, Kawelecht, Ultzen Thiesenhausiorum* (Napierisky 1851, 126, 140).

In July 1558 Vaabina was a camping site of the troops of the Livonian branch of the Teutonic Order (Renner 1995, 48–49). The Polish inventory from 1582 (Westrén-Doll 1923) mentions a fallen and ruined stone house which formerly belonged to Fabian Tyzenhauzen (Hermann 1973, 3). The list of buildings of Vaabina manor in the so-called Lithuanian metrics from 1590 notes the manor consisting of a simple dwelling house with a stove and chipboard roof, a barn of six rooms under a long roof, and the walls of an old, deserted stone house between them. The manor buildings of that time included horse stables, a kitchen, a sauna, a stone cellar, and a small mill at the pond (LM 1590, 377ff.). The same situation – a deserted stone house, only walls standing (*kamenieca spustoszona, tylko mur stoj*) is noted between economic buildings of the manor also in the inventory of 1591 (Roslavlev 1970, 303) and a fallen stone house is mentioned in 1599 (Feuereisen 1909, 230). Vaabina is also included in the list of ‘mostly destroyed’ castles of Livonia in the chronicle by Christian Kelch, finished in 1690 (Kelch 2004, 10). Eduard Philipp Körber, a researcher of Livonia’s history, notes a stone heap and some moats preserved from Vaabina castle in his manuscript from 1802 (Körber 1802, 383). By the late 1930s only a few wall remains had preserved from the medieval castle which was defined, together with other vassal castles of Tartu prince-bishopric, as *kastellartiger Vasallenburg* (Tuulse 1942, 266).



**Fig. 1.** Abstract from the earliest plan of the lands of Vaabina manor. *Charte von dem Guthe Ueltzen mit dessen dazu gehörigen Bauern und deren Ländereyen im Urbschen Kirchpiel belägen.* Copy made in 1737 from the original from the 1680s or 1690s.

**Jn 1.** Väljavõte Vaabina mõisa maade vanimast plaanist: 1737. a koopia 17. saj lõpukümnendite originaalist. (LVVA 6828.4.467, p. 1.)



**Fig. 2.** Map of Vaabina manor centre in 1868. *Charte von dem im Livländischen Gouvernement Doerpt-Werroschen Kreise und Anzenschen Kirchspiele belegenen privaten Gute Uelzen 1868.*

**Jn 2.** Vaabina mõisasüda 1868. (RA, EAA.2072.9.727, p. 1.)



**Fig. 3.** Photo of the main building of Vaabina manor from before the 1920s, view from the north.

**Jn 3.** Vaabina mõisa peahoone enne 1920. aastaid, vaade põhjast. (VK F 820 F.)

Photo / Foto: Võrumaa Museum (Võro Institute) / Võrumaa muuseum (Võro Instituut)

The earliest information about the location of Vaabina manor dates from the 1680s or 1690s (Fig. 1). The landscape and the network of roads indicate that the manor centre of the Swedish period was located in the same place with the historical manor centre depicted on the earliest detailed manor map from 1868 (Fig. 2). The last stage of the big manor house – a building in Historicist style with two wings – had two floors, but there were three floors in its central part (Fig. 3). Since the image of the manor on old photos does not correspond well to the plan of the building depicted on the map from 1868 (see Fig. 2), the house has been reconstructed in the last third of the 19th century.

The manor belonged to the von Samson-Himmelstjerna family until 1919 when the owners lost it, resulting from the birth of the Republic of Estonia and its land reform. The nationalized manor house did not get any new function. The deserted building was gradually demolished and sold for building material – for the new school (its construction began in 1933) and for local farms.<sup>1</sup> The remains of the western wing were partly still standing after World War II, but were finally destroyed in 1967 when the Antsla–Vaabina road which formerly passed east of the manor centre and its park (see Fig. 1) was straightened. Now the new road was cut directly through the central part of the manor house. During the construction work the foundations of the destroyed manor house with a thin layer of charcoal under them were noted in the depth of ca. 3 metres (Hermann 1973, 6).

<sup>1</sup> Oral information from local inhabitant Erma Kallasse.

**MONITORING IN 2020**

By the spring of 2020 when the road through the former manor house was planned to be straightened again, no visible remains of the building had preserved above the ground level. When the western profile of the road was cleaned with excavator, cross sections of the foundations of the demolished manor hall came to light (Fig. 4). Judging by their structure, the walls originate from different construction periods. To estimate the preservation of the

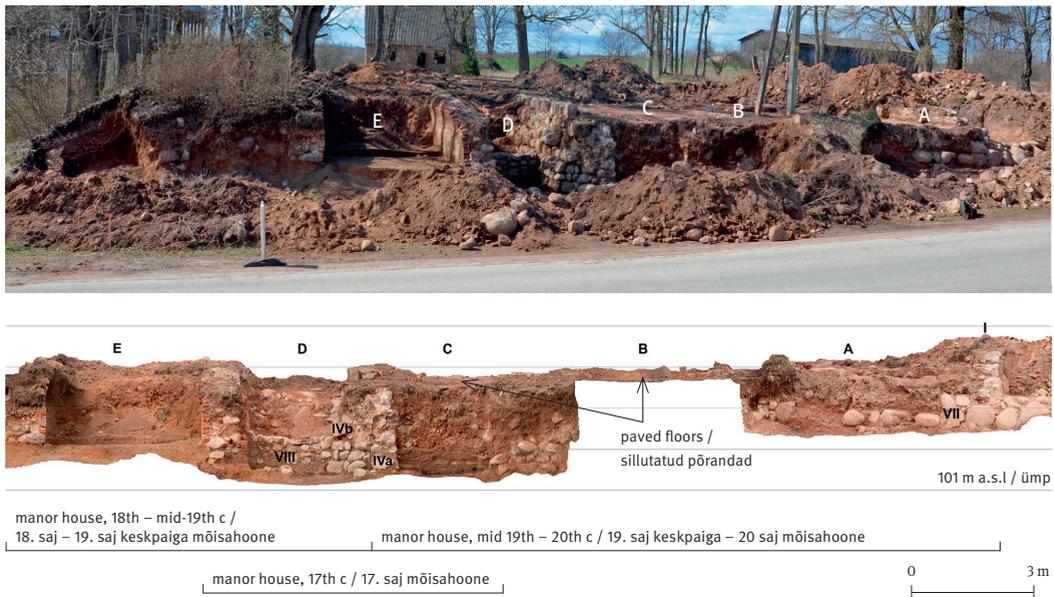


**Fig. 4.** Photogrammetry-based ortophoto of the unearthed rooms of Vaabina manor.  
**Jn 4.** Vaabina mõisas avatud ruumide fotogramm-meetria põhine ortofoto.  
 Photo / Foto: Ragnar Saage

building remains, turf and top soil were removed by backhoe from the area planned for the road. Now brick floors and lower parts of walls of six rooms of the latest stage of the manor house (Fig. 4: A–C, F–H; Fig. 5b: A–C; Fig. 6) – the remains of the southern part of its western wing were unearthed. West of the western end of the building, beside the rooms F and G (Fig. 4) the cobblestone pavement of the yard was discovered.

Walls of two more cellars south of the 19th-century manor house – those of rooms D and E came to light in the southern end of the profile (Figs 4–5). Since the walls of these rooms with no remains of brick floors were thicker and built mainly of granite, they seemed to be earlier than those of the latest stage of the manor house. Fill of demolition debris was removed from these rooms by backhoe until the cultural layer in the bottom of their cellars. These cultural layers were archaeologically investigated by sieving all soil.<sup>2</sup>

Room D was 2.2 to 2.6 m wide<sup>3</sup>, lined with bricks on the south side and with granite stones on the north side. The upper part of the cultural layers in its bottom consisted of ca. 20 cm thick layer of disturbed sand which contained big fragments of hand-made glass bottles, probably for wine, dating from the 18th or 19th centuries.<sup>4</sup> The lower part of room D was divided into two by a ca. 30 cm wide stone wall whereby west of it a fill layer of disturbed clay followed the floor sand. On both sides of the wall there was a 10–15 cm thick 17th-century grey cultural layer which contained fragments of a big dark gray low fired earthenware vessel (Fig. 7: 5), as well as smaller earthenware and glazed redware (Fig. 7: 2–4) fragments. The cultural layer was followed by a layer of debris which contained fragments of stove tiles from



**Fig. 5.** Foundations and rooms A–E of Vaabina manor in the profile of the road. View from the east. A photo and photogrammetric image.

**Jn 5.** Vaabina mõisahoone ruumid A–E ja vundamendid maantee profiilis. Vaade idast. Foto ja fotogramm-meetria kujutis.

Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk, photogrammetry / fotogramm-meetria: Ragnar Saage

<sup>2</sup> The finds: TÕ 2867: 1–71.

<sup>3</sup> Measures from the top of the preserved walls and from the bottom.

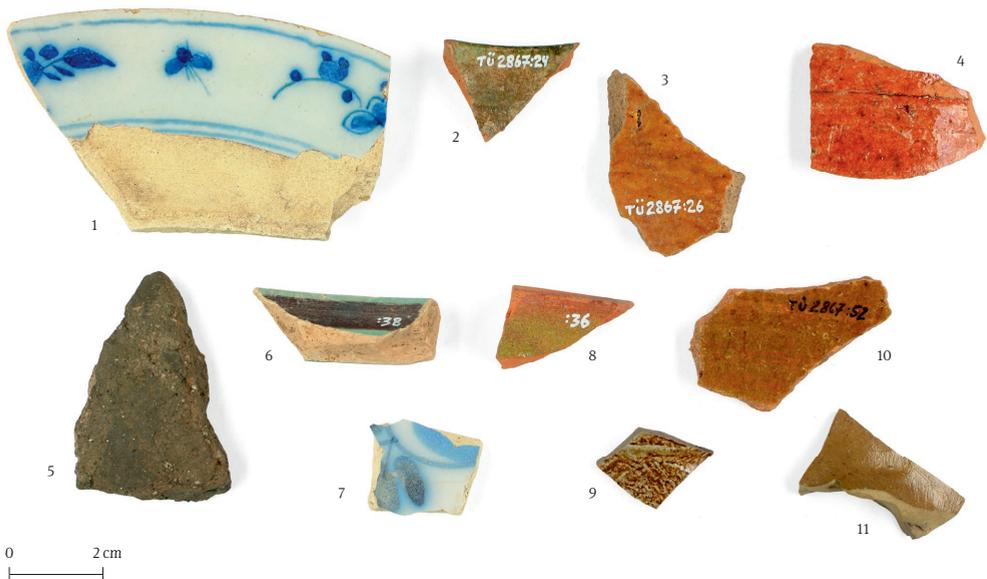
<sup>4</sup> Glass finds were reviewed and estimated by Monika Reppo (TÜ).

the 17th century, and glazed redware. That layer also yielded some fragments of faceted glass vessels: a bottle (: 12) and a drinking glass (: 13). Under the layer of debris there was a 5–10 cm thick layer of charcoal and poorly preserved brands – remains of the fire which had caused the formation of the demolition debris. From the layer of debris and the layer of charcoal below it two strongly burnt Swedish  $\frac{1}{4}$ -öre coins from 1632–1654 (: 48, 50), but also a stoneware (Fig. 7: 9) and a redware fragment (Fig. 7: 10) were found. The black layer of fire remains contained, in addition, a tiny round lead alloy bullet (: 54), and a clay pipe fragment (: 53). The layer rested on intact loam and no cultural layer had formed in the bottom of the cellar. As the fill of the walls of room D included only fragments of Early Modern bricks (thickness 6.5–7 cm), but no fragments of medieval origin (thickness 9–10 cm) were found, the cellar was evidently post-medieval.



**Fig. 6.** Foundations of the rooms and floors of the latest construction stage of the western wing of Vaabina manor. View from the north-west.

**Jn 6.** Vaabina mõisa läänetiiva ruumide vundamendid ja hoone hilisema ehitusjärgu põrandad. Vaade loodest. Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk



**Fig. 7.** Finds from the cellars of Vaabina manor. 1–10 – room D (17th century), 11 – room E (18th – mid-19th century). 1–4 – 17th century grey cultural layer, 5–8 – layer of post-fire demolition debris, 9, 10 – layer of brands. 1, 6, 7 – tin-glazed ware, 2–4, 8, 10 – redware, 5 – local dark ware, 9, 11 – stoneware.

**Jn 7.** Leide Vaabina mõisakeldritest. 1–10 – ruum D (17. saj), 11 – ruum E (18. saj – 19. saj algupool). 1–10 – ruum D, 11 – ruum E. 1–4 – 17. saj põlengujärgne hall kultuurkiht, 5–8 – tulekahju järgne lammutusrusu kiht, 9–10 – põlengukiht. 1, 6, 7 – fajanss, 2–4, 8, 10 – punane glasuurkeraamika, 5 – lihtkedrakeraamika, 9, 11 – kivikeraamika.

(TÜ 2867: 28, 24, 26, 25, 45, 38, 43, 36, 51, 52, 56.)

Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk

The same stratigraphy as in room D could be observed in the same depth in the road trench profile also in the bottom of room C. Since the brick floor of the latest stage of the manor house had preserved well in room C (Fig. 4), its cellar was not opened. The 17th-century cultural layer in its bottom was studied only by approaching from the trench profile.

From the layer of debris, mainly from room C, several fragments of stove tiles (Fig. 8), some with the images of the Swedish royal couple – King Gustav II Adolph (ruled 1611–1632) (Fig. 8: 11, 12) and his wife Queen Maria Eleonora (since 1620) (Fig. 8: 5, 9, 10) were discovered.<sup>5</sup> Some of them were strongly burnt, glaze covered with bubbles, evidently damaged in the fire which destroyed the manor house.

Room E was the southernmost room of the row. It was 2.7 m wide, lined with bricks on both sides and had originally been covered by a cylinder vault. The sand floor under the fill of debris contained animal bones, fragments of the 18th and 19th centuries glass bottles, and a stoneware fragment (Fig. 7: 11). Two clay pipe fragments (: 57) suggest that the cellar was built in the 18th century. Since its southern wall differed from the northern one, and since the layer of debris with stove tile fragments was missing in room E, the room was evidently of later origin than rooms C and D.



**Fig. 8.** Fragments of stove tiles, probably from the 1630s or 1640s, from the cellars of Vaabina manor.

**Jn 8.** Arvatavalt 1630. või 1640. aastate kahlite katked Vaabina mõisa keldrist.

(TÜ 2867: 1, 8a, 46, 8b, 35, 46, 7, 8c, 5, 4, 3, 6.)

Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk

<sup>5</sup> Oral comment by Andres Tvauri (TÜ). Similar tiles from Tartu have been published by Konrad Strauss (1969, Taf. 61).

### Faunal remains

The bone assemblage (Fig. 9) contained 960 finds (Rannamäe & Ehrlich 2020) whereby the 17th century layers involved the total of 193 animal bones. The most numerous among those are unidentified mammal (56.8%) and fish (14.1%) bones. Small bovids (sheep /goat) make 3.5%, pig 4.2% and cattle 2.6% of the total of bone finds. Concerning domestic animals which could be identified at the level of species, and bird bones identified mostly at the level of order or family, it can be noted that when comparing the 17th century bone finds to the 18th and 19th centuries, the share of bird (48.5% → 32.4%) and pig bones (30.3% → 13.5%) has decreased, but the percentage of cattle bones (9.1% → 21.6%) and sheep/goat bones (11.1% → 31.1%) has increased. Cut marks were observed on 103 bones (11%), traces of gnawing on 18 bones (2%) and 35 bone finds (7%) were cremated. The presence of turkey (1 bone)<sup>6</sup> must specially be noted among the 17th century finds, and that of oyster shells (4 items) from the 18th–19th centuries.

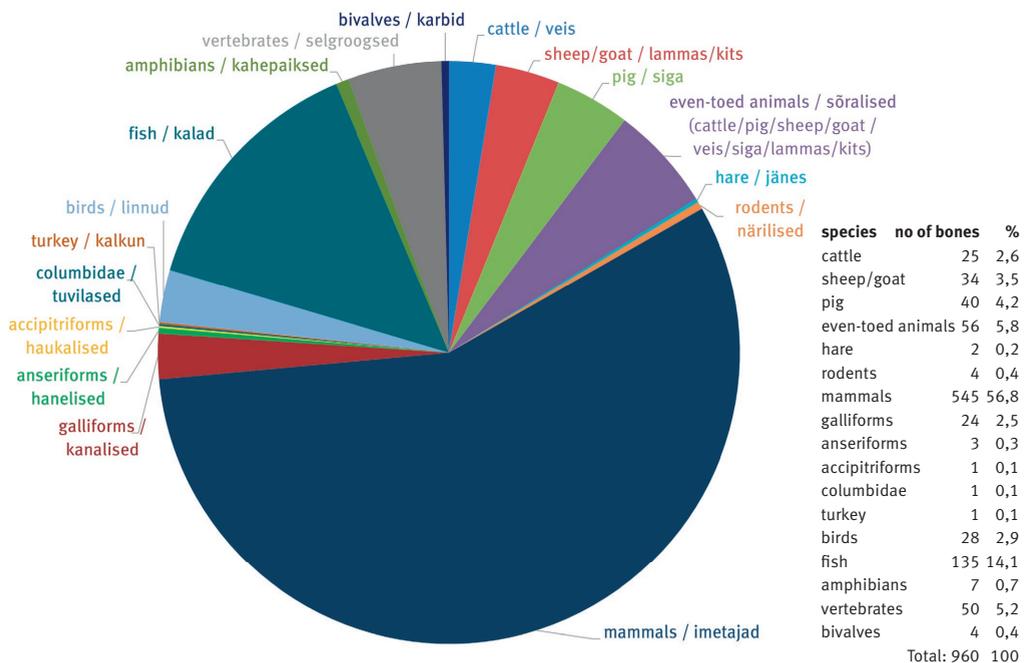


Fig. 9. Bone finds from Vaabina manor.

Jn 9. Luuleiud Vaabina mõisast.

Identification and illustration by / Määranud ja joonise koostanud Eve Rannamäe

### DISCUSSION

Similar stratigraphy and finds in the lowest layers of rooms C and D indicate that the rooms were of simultaneous use and originate from the 17th century. Evidently, the layer of fire in the bottom of these cellars was the same layer of charcoal which had been observed in 1967 (Hermann 1973), although it appeared in the depth of ca. 2 m, and not 3 m from the ground level – in bigger depths only intact loam could be observed in the whole profile of the road trench.

<sup>6</sup> This rare find, as well as other finds of bird bones were identified by Freydis Ehrlich (TÜ).

Monitoring and trial excavations gave no evidence of a medieval castle or medieval cultural layers – finds from that time were discovered neither from the disturbed, nor from the *in situ* layers. Likewise, no medieval bricks or their fragments were discovered, neither as stray finds, nor in the walls of rooms with 17th-century cultural layers. However, excavation results indicate constructing a manor house with stone cellars and with tiled stoves in the beginning of the period of Swedish rule, most likely, either in the 1630s or in the 1640s. The lower time limit of this construction activity might be defined with the end of the war between Sweden and the commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania (Rzeczpospolita) in 1629. It seems likely that although war activities ended in Livonia in 1625 when Tartu was conquered by the Swedish army, only the peace treaty of Altmärk could grant stability and provide preconditions for major reconstruction of manor buildings in the countryside. Since no cultural layer had formed on the cellar floor before the fire, the room could function only for a very limited time before its destruction. Finds from Vaabina are the first indication of building manor houses of stone (or at least with stone cellars) from the second quarter of the 17th century in southern Estonia.

Stove tiles with the images of the royal couple Gustav II Adolph and Queen Maria Eleonora have until now been found only from the territory of Estonia.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, since there are no direct parallels known from Latvia or Sweden, they seem to represent a local production centre. As known from written data, the manor of Vaabina was endowed after the Swedish conquest by King Gustav II Adolph (1611–1632) to Friedrich Rosladin (Frizz Radislai), since 1636 by Queen Christina to Johann Eberhard von Bellingshausen (Johann Ewerdt Billingshusen) (Revisjon 1638, 51).<sup>8</sup> The use of tiles with the images of the royal couple can be regarded as a sign of loyalty of the manor owner to the King of Sweden.

The manor house with stone cellars and tiled stoves did not exist for a long time. Since the fire remains contained two coins of Queen Christina, it probably perished around the middle of the 17th century. It cannot be excluded that the manor was burnt during the war between Sweden and Russia in 1656–1661. However, the house was rebuilt and the cellar was taken into use in the second half of the 17th century again.

Archaeological finds give evidence of extending or re-constructing the manor house of stone in the 18th century when room E was added to the formerly existing room D. Since the width of the manor house according to Uno Hermann's post-war measurements (16.44 m) corresponds to the width of rooms A, B and C, but the total width of the building, including rooms D and E, is 24 m, rooms D and E did not belong to the latest stage of the manor house, having evidently been demolished by that time. It is possible, however, that cellars under these rooms remained still in use under the terrace platform.

Since the cellar walls and brick floors of the manor house were in good condition, the road reconstruction plans were altered. The walls and floors were preserved and covered with soil again.

## CONCLUSIONS

Archaeological monitoring in the centre of historical Vaabina manor gave no evidence of the remains of the medieval vassal castle. It was established, however, that the manor house with stone cellars and tiled stoves was built probably in the 1630s or 1640s and that it was destroyed in fire, probably, in the middle of that century. Until now there has been no

<sup>7</sup> Oral comment by Andres Tvaari (TÜ).

<sup>8</sup> See also: <https://www.archivesportaleurope.net/ead-display/-/ead/pl/aicode/EE-RA/type/fa/id/EAA.1401/unitid/EAA.1401>

information of constructing new manor houses of stone in the early period of the Swedish rule from southern Estonia. Archaeological evidence shows extending the manor house in the 18th century and its profound reconstruction in the last third of the 19th century.

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## ARHEOLOOGILISED PÄÄSTEUURINGUD VAABINA MÕISAASEMEL

Heiki Valk

2020. a kevadel toimus Vaabina mõisa peahoone asukohas arheoloogiline järelevalve seoses Antsla–Vaabina maantee õgvendustöödega. Kirjalike allikate teatel asus Vaabina keskaegne vasallilinnus (mainitud 1555. a). Vanade kaartide põhjal läks maantee varem kaarega ida poolt ümber mõisasüdame (jn 1–2). Vaabina mõisahooned (jn 3) lammutati 1920. ja 1930. aastatel ehitusmaterjaliks. Viimased müüriosad tasandati 1967. a, mil uue maantee süvend kaevati otse läbi hoone keskkoha.

Maanteeüvendi profiili puhastamisel tulid nähtavale mõisakeldrite müürid (jn 4). Kokku paljandus profiilis viie ruumi (A–E) asukoht. Pärast tee profiili avamist eemaldati õgvendusala piires avastatud ruumide pealt kamara- ja mullakiht ning paljandusid 19. saj lõpukolmandikul ehitatud ja 20. saj hävinud

mõisahooned tellispõrandad (jn 5). Kolm põhjapoolset ruumi (A, B ja C) seostuvad selle hoonega, kaks lõunapoolset keldrit (D ja E) pärinevad varasematest ehitusjätkudest. Arheoloogiliselt uuriti kavandatud ehitusala piires keldrite D ja E sisu ning kultuurikihti ruumi C maantee poolses profiilis. 19. saj peahoone läänetiiva otsas puhastati osaliselt välja ka väiksemate ruumide F, G ja H tellispõrandaid ning mõisaõue munakivisillutist (jn 6).

Ruumidest C ja D avastati rootsiaegne 10–15 cm paksune hall kultuurikiht, mis sisaldas fajansi, punase glasuurkeraamika ning suure lihtkedrakeraamilise nõu kilde, samast leiti ka kivikeraamika katke (jn 7). Päril nende keldrite põhjas oli põlengukiht, mida katvates lammutusruusudes oli erinevate musta glasuuriga ahjukahlite tükke (jn 8), sealhulgas Rootsi

kuninga Gustav II Adolfi (1611–1632) ja tema abikaasa Maria Eleonora kujutistega. Rusu- ja põlengukihist avastatud kaks kuninganna Kristina (1632–54) veerandöörilist lubavad tules hävinud hoone ehituse dateerida tõenäoliselt 1630. või 1640. aastatesse. Kuna põlengukihi alla keldri põhja polnud tekkinud kultuurkihti, hävis hoone varsti pärast valmimist, 17. saj keskpaiku. Kunagi Põhjasõja järel on ruumile D pärast täitepinnase toomist tehtud liivapõrand, millest leiti 18.–19. saj klaaspudelite kilde. Ruum E on ruumidest C ja D hilisem. Selle põhjast leitud liivane kultuurkiht sisaldas loomaluud ja väheseid 18.–19. saj leide, saadi ka üks kivikeraamikakatke (jn 7: 11).

Looma-, linnu- ja kalaluude seas (960 leidu, jn 9) domineerivad liigi tasandini määrata imetajad (56,8%) ja kalad (14,1%). Luude koguarvust moodustavad lamba- ja kitseluud 3,5%, sealuud 4,2%, kodu- veise luud 2,6%. Liigi tasandil määratavate kodu- looma- ja seltsi või sugukonna tasandil määratavate linnuluude koondarvestuses väärrib märkimist, et

võrreldes 17. sajandiga on 18.–19. sajandil kahanenud linnu- (48,5% → 32,4%) ja sealuude osakaal (30,3% → 13,5%), kasvanud aga veise- (9,1% → 21,6%) ning lamba- või kitseluude protsent (11,1% → 31,1%).

Uuringutel ei saadud ühegi keskaegset leidu ning ka müüride ehituskehendist ega keldreid täitvast rusust ei tulnud nähtavale ühtegi keskaegse tellise tükki. Samas puudusid varem Lõuna-Eestist andmed kivist või vähemalt kivikeldritega mõisahoonete ehitamisest 17. saj teisel veerandil. Kaevamistulemused näitavad, et historitsistliku mõisahoone läänetiib ei ole hõlmanud lõunapoolsete ruumide D ja E ala. Uue mõisahoone ehitamisel on nende keldrite kohal olnud maapealsed ruumid lammutatud, kuid keldrite puhul ei saa välistada kasutusse jäämist, nt terrassi aluste ruumidena.

Kuigi vasallilinnuse jäänuseid ei õnnestunud leida, muudeti hästisäilinud vundamentide ja põrandate tõttu ehitusprojekti, teed õgvendati kavandatud vähem ning varem kaeti pinnasega.