

# KLEIN GANNAHOEK: AN ARCHAEO-ARCHITECTURAL INVESTIGATION OF AN AFRICAN FARMHOUSE\*

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## ABSTRACT

This research arises out of the general interest that has been shown in the life and work of Olive Schreiner. The role that the Klein Gannahoek farmhouse played in shaping the fictional landscape of her work seemed to warrant it a closer investigation. The primary aim of the project was to investigate and record the architectural developments of the farmhouse; describe the floor plan of the building for possible rebuilding in Cradock. In addition, photographs of the site were taken for record purposes and for use in the display that is mounted at Schreiner House in Cradock as well as for use in a possible future display at Klein Gannahoek.

## INTRODUCTION

Klein Gannahoek is situated on the farm Gannahoek (25.35S; 32.20E), which is 47 km from Cradock and close to Mortimer (Fig. 1). The site is at the foot of Gannahoekberg and lies north-west of Vanheerderskop, near the Hugo Kloof Spruit. The well known South African writer, Olive Schreiner, lived at Klein Gannahoek in 1875 and 1876. The farm was owned by Stoffel Fouché until 1887, when he sold it to W. van Heerden. He in turn exchanged Klein Gannahoek with Richard Cawood for one of Cawood's farms, Dooren Kloof, north of Cradock (Cronwright-Schreiner Diary, 12-6-1921). Richard Cawood later renamed the farm York. From 1896 until the present day Klein Gannahoek has been in the Cawood family.

Fouché employed Olive Schreiner as a governess for his children. The surroundings of the farm set the scene for *Undine*, *A Queer Little Child*, and her story *Thorn Hill*, which later became *The story of an African farm*. According to her husband, S. C. Cronwright-Schreiner, Olive Schreiner claimed that she had written an early draft of *The Story of an African Farm* whilst she was staying at Klein Gannahoek (Cronwright-Schreiner Diary, 11-6-1921). The farmhouse is also in close proximity to Schreiner's grave, which is situated on Buffelskop a few kilometres distant (Fig. 1).

Increasing visits to the Klein Gannahoek farmsite by the public, the removal of surface cultural material and the natural deterioration of the site, necessitated an investigation. The purpose of this project was to locate

and identify the size and shape of the farmhouse, to date and confirm the identity of the structure, to trace stages of development of the building and to ascertain the methods and materials of its construction. All artefacts found during the course of this investigation were recorded for the purposes of further research, which might be undertaken by cultural historians who could possibly relate the artefacts to the building's occupants.

## THE KLEIN GANNAHOEK FARM SITE

The original farmhouse dates from about 1826 as the farm is listed in the eastern Cape Frontier zone map in the field corner district of Zwagers Hoek of this year (Bergh & Visagie 1985:37). The site is covered in rubble, natural vegetation, top soil, silt and goat dung. Most of the house was demolished in 1893 when the new owner, Richard Cawood, removed the roof and converted the house into a goat shed (Cronwright-Schreiner Diary, 11-6-1921).

The site was very overgrown and had to be cleared to reveal the general structure of the homestead. No complete walls are standing and the only really visible features are some stone foundations and steps (Fig. 2). The remains of a small brick wall, some foundations, three sets of stone stairs and broken stone-wall foundations that support a stone-flagged 'stoep' were visible before cleaning (Fig. 3).

The site is in close proximity to a spring and a dry mountain river-bed known as Hugo Kloof Spruit

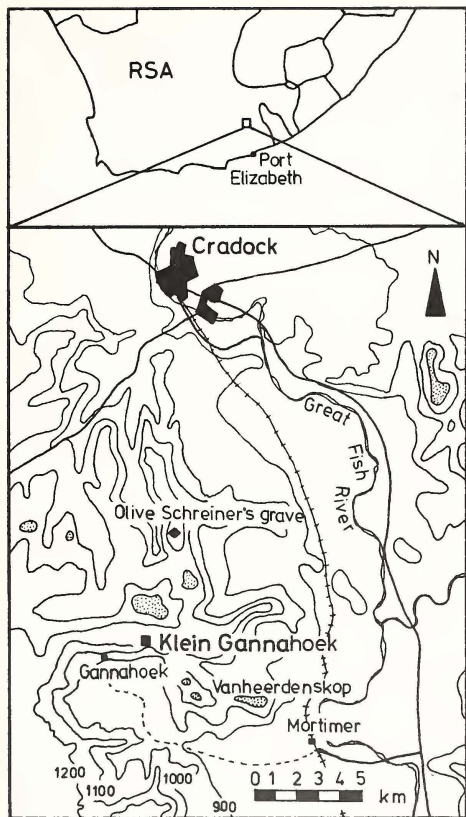


Fig. 1. Location of Klein Gannahoek.



Fig. 2. Klein Gannahoek farm site.

(Cronwright-Schreiner Diary, 12-6-1921). There is also evidence of a silted-up earth dam and a stone wall situated north of the homestead. It is believed that a canal



Fig. 3. Remaining structures of the farm house.

system was constructed to lead water into the dam, but this has not yet being located. There is a stone wall that leads from the back of the house to the dam wall.

Other structures in the vicinity of the farmhouse include what might be identified as being a tack or wagon shed, a pig or goat enclosure, a grave site, large stone-walled kraal and a native hut.

#### METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

Before the investigation started, sketches and photographs were taken. Temporary bench marks were set up one metre from the corner post on either side of the grid, one facing north-east and the other facing south-west. A grid system of two-metre square blocks was then drawn up and the architectural features were recorded (Fig. 4). Pencil-sketches were done of the various elevations and photographs of the features from various positions were taken.

Test trenches were then excavated in selected areas to reveal the architectural features, such as doorways, internal walls and floors. (Fig. 4). All artefacts encountered were collected and soil samples were taken. These soil samples helped to formulate the stratigraphy chart (Fig. 5). When the investigation was completed, a floor-plan was drawn up (Fig. 6) and the trenches and test pits back-filled.

At the museum the artefacts were counted, cleaned, marked and sorted into various categories by material (metal, glass, ceramics, wood, etc.). The artefacts have not been studied in any detail.

#### STRATIGRAPHY

The stratification shown in figure 5 indicated a possible accumulation of natural, animal and man-made disturbances on the site of the building. The sketches indicate deposits which can logically be associated with dated occupations. The earliest period can be associated with the occupation of the Fouché and Van Heerden families, dating from as early as 1826 to 1896. This period is indicated by the floor level (earth floor) and building structures: the stone foundation, brick walls and

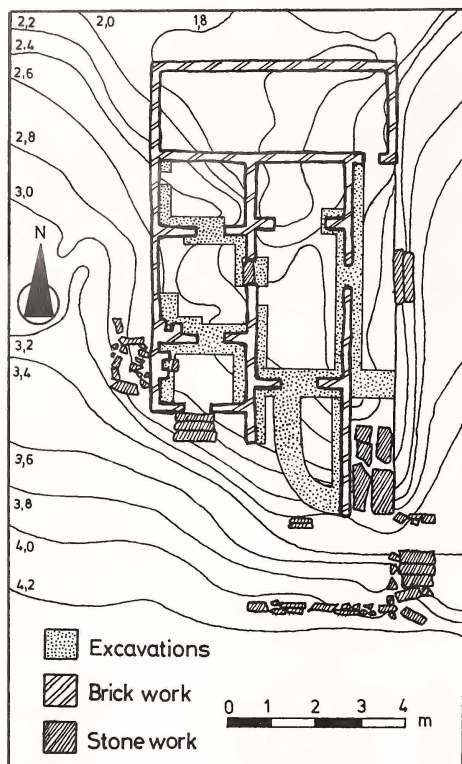


Fig. 4. Floor-plan before the investigation.

stone-flagged 'stoep'. The second period could possibly be from 1896 to 1921. During this time Richard Cawood acquired the farm and converted the homestead into a goat shed. Some of the shards dating to this period could have belonged to a coloured herdsman and his family, who are mentioned as occupying the house by Cronwright-Schreiner (11-6-1921). This period is indicated by a layer of goat dung found within the actual foundation structure. The third dates from 1921 to the present day.

#### ARCHITECTURAL RECONSTRUCTION OF THE KLEIN GANNAHOEK FARMHOUSE

There are only five available photographs of the Klein Gannahoek farmhouse. Three photographs are housed in the National English Literary Museum collections (taken by S.C. Cronwright-Schreiner) and the other two belong to the University of Cape Town and Cradock Public Libraries respectively. The first photograph (Figs. 7) was taken in 1893 when S.C. Cronwright-Schreiner visited W. van Heerden. Two later photographs (Figs. 8 & 9) were taken of the farmhouse when he visited Richard Cawood on 13 June 1921. The other two photographs,

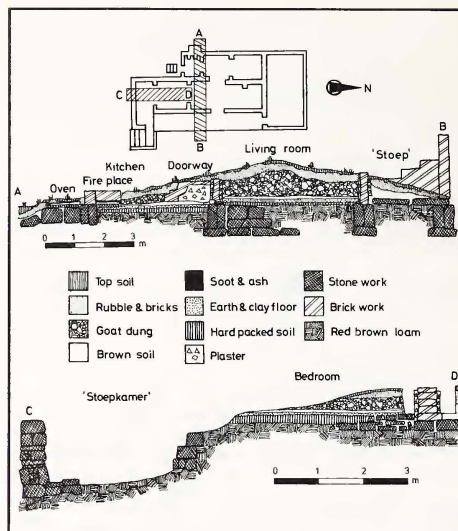


Fig. 5. Stratigraphy and elevation of the foundations.

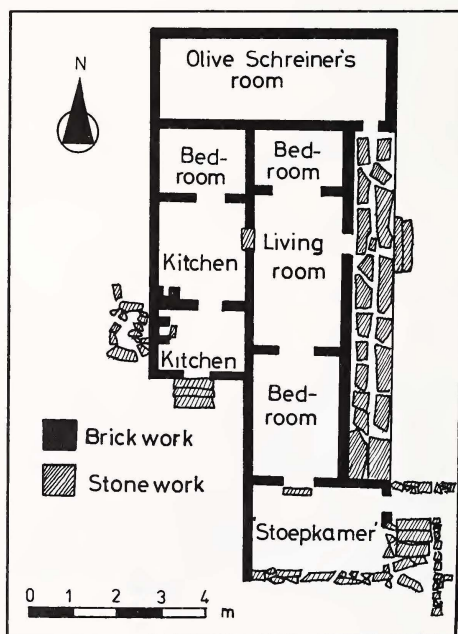


Fig. 6. Floor-plan after the investigation.

showing the front stoep of the farmhouse, belong to the University of Cape Town Library (Fig. 10, No. B2D



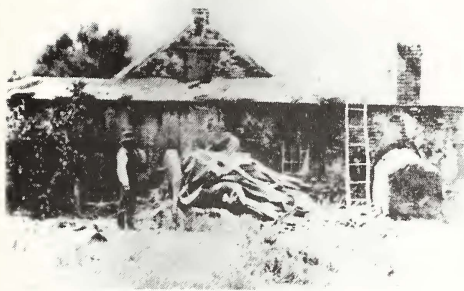


Fig. 7. Photograph of the farmhouse taken by Cronwright-Schreiner in 1893 with the inscription; "The room in which *The Story of an African Farm* was written" (Photograph NELM).



Fig. 8. Photograph taken by Cronwright-Schreiner on 13 June 1921 with the inscription; "The same house, northern aspect (facing the mountain). The window of Olive's room was where the coloured girl dressed in white is standing. Compare this photo with that taken by me in 1893 before the house was in ruins. Note the spot where the oven was in the wall on the right. Here Olive began *The Story of an African Farm*" (Photograph NELM).

73/5) and to Cradock Public Library (Fig. 11).

There is little available evidence of the structure of the farmhouse. The only reference to the structure was made by S.C. Cronwright-Schreiner in his diary in the entries for 7-15 June 1921 and 8-29 August 1921 and by First & Scott (1989) in their biography of Olive Schreiner.

In the first stages of construction it probably resembled a simple Karoo farm-dwelling. A similar example was photographed by S.C. Cronwright-Schreiner on the neighbouring farm Gannahoek owned by Richard Cawood. It is possible that the same mason built both houses and therefore probably had similar architectural

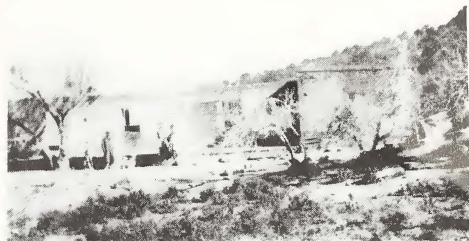


Fig. 9. Photograph taken by Cronwright-Schreiner on 13 June 1921 with the inscription; "Ruins of Fouché's house, Klein Gannahoek, Cradock, where Olive was governess in 1875 and 1876; eastern front. The farm is now owned by the Cawoods, whose father (Richard) was living at Gannahoek adjoining it on its western boundary; the Cawoods have called Fouché's farm York its outstation, to the east, Olive's Loss" (Photograph NELM).



Fig. 10. Klein Gannahoek farmhouse front 'stoep' (Photograph University of Cape Town Libraries).

features. Originally the Klein Gannahoek farmhouse probably consisted of a livingroom and bedroom with the kitchen adjoining the main structure (Figs. 12a & b). It had a raised stone-flagged stoep, running the full length of the front of the house. The investigation uncovered the foundations of the main structure which had load-bearing walls 330 mm thick and an adjoining kitchen on the west side.

#### Foundations

The foundations were built of dagha (mud mortar) and of local stone. The shale stone was probably quarried near the building-site as the area has an abundance of smooth flat-sided rocks. The foundations are slightly wider than the thickness of the walls. Within the external walls the foundation has an approximate depth of 250 mm below natural ground level and was





Fig. 11. Klein Gannahoek farmhouse front 'stoep' looking north (Photograph Cradock Public Library).

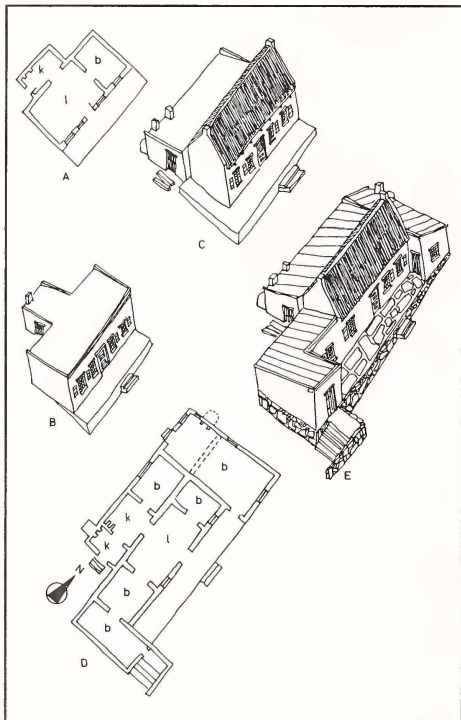


Fig. 12. The assumed plan and possible appearance of the farmhouse between 1825 and 1921.

built up to floor level from where the wall was constructed in brick and clay (Fig. 5). The same stone was also used on the 'stoep' area and for the steps. The foundations are laid in undressed specked-rubble style, where rectangular stones are roughly squared and laid

without continuous horizontal courses. Specks are small square stones at least 75 mm in diameter.

The 'stoep' is made up of large flat stones embedded on top of stone foundations with hard-core packed into the foundations.

### Walls

The brick walls appear to be built in 1,5 brick English bond construction style (Barry 1971:19). No full-length or full-height superstructure walls are left standing. Apart from the remains of one small superstructure brick wall, most of the walls are only three courses high and are covered by a layer of goat dung, rubble, silt and soil. The walls are made of red baked-clay bricks of various strengths.

The bricks themselves are made up of a clay and gravel mixture which most probably came from the brickfields on the farm Easterstead near the Fish River. The external walls are 1,5 bricks wide (330 mm thick load-bearing walls) and the internal walls are one brick wide (220 mm thick non-load-bearing). The bricks are bound by dagha mortar and are spaced approximately 10 mm apart in both the horizontal and vertical joints. They were probably moulded in a wooden jig and sun-dried and then packed into a clamp and fired. The average size of the bricks is 220 mm x 110 mm x 75 mm and weight approximately 2,65 kg.

### Construction of bricks

The bricks at Klein Gannahoek generally consist of red earth, gravel or grog (crushed bricks) and sand. This mixture is known as brick earth. Water is added to give plasticity to the brick earth so that it can easily be moulded in a jig or wood mould to give uniformity to the bricks. Gravel is used as it contains iron oxide, which acts as a flux in that it promotes partial fusion and increases the tendency to vitrify, thus producing a much stronger and more watertight brick.

### The roof

#### Stage one: mono-pitched roof

S.C. Cronwright-Schreiner claims that the Fouchés and W. van Heerden added to or altered the homestead (Cronwright-Schreiner Diary, 12-6-1921). At the first stage of construction the roof appears to have been mono-pitched (Figs. 12a & b). Cronwright-Schreiner also refers to the common use of flat corrugated-iron roofing in the Cradock district which he describes in detail in his diary.

#### Stage two: double-pitched roof

The house at Klein Gannahoek later had its mono-pitched roof removed and replaced by a double-pitched roof (Figs. 12c & e; 7, 10 & 11). The photographs show a thatched double-pitched roof over the livingrooms or bedrooms. A loft is distinctly visible on the north side of the homestead. At either end of the thatched roof is a gable wall. The type of thatch used was possibly a local grass that still exists around the farm

house known as 'dekgras' or thatching grass (*Hyparrheria hirta*). It could also have been the stalks from wheat that is grown in the Fish River Valley (De Kock, pers. comm. Grootfontein Agricultural College, Middelburg, Cape).

### Stage three: the addition of a lean-to roof

Lean-to roofs were later added to the main structure of the farmhouse (Fig. 11e). These lean-to roofs were constructed on the north, west and south sides of the house. The first was possibly constructed on the west side, thereby expanding the kitchen space and providing a pantry/kitchen and spare room. The second lean-to roof was constructed on the north side to accommodate a kitchen, 'stoepkamer', and a room for the governess. A section of lean-to roof was later demolished to allow the loft door to open onto the northern lean-to roof (Fig. 7; 12d & e).

The evidence for a southern lean-to roof over what was possibly the stoepkamer is suggested by the Cradock Public Library photograph (Fig. 11). A structure that looks like the extension wall of the purported 'stoepkamer' is clearly seen branching out from the gable wall which supports the double-pitched roof. An elevation of the outer corner wall of the 'stoepkamer' is clearly seen in the photograph.

No trace of gutters or water tanks can be discerned from either of the photographs. The lean-to roof was made of corrugated iron sheets which were removed by Richard Cawood in 1893 for use in a goat shed on the farm Trelawny. (Cronwright-Schreiner Diary, 11-6-1921).

### Floors

The floors are made of a mud/clay substance mixed with cow dung. Three earth floors were located. The core of the earth floor was 140 mm thick compacted fine-grain soil. The present layer of dung floor is approximately 35 mm thick (Fig. 13).



Fig. 13. Exposed dung floor and brick wall.

Biographers First & Scott (1989) refer to Olive Schreiner's room at Klein Gannahoek;

Building materials were scarce in the district

and floors were made of mud; Olive's room was not in the main part of the house but a flat roofed lean-to, and it leaked badly. It contained a primitive bedstead and a box for her books; when the rain was heavy she used to put an umbrella over herself." (First & Scott 1989:73).

### Windows and shutters

No trace of the windows is left on the present site. However, four photographs show the type of windows used in the building (Figs. 7, 10 & 11). Three different windows can be identified, namely, sliding sash-windows, single casement windows and a single shutter window. Alterations to the window positions which had been made at various times can be seen in photographs (Fig. 8 & 9). The northern back-wall windows were all bricked up and plastered over by Richard Cawood when he converted the house into a goat shed. Another window was converted to a doorway.

### Doors

Apart from two small sections of door-frame, no complete doors or door-frames were located on the site. The samples are in a very serious state of decay, having been buried under layers of goat-dung. Only two short lengths of architraves, measuring 1,28 m and 1,26 m, were found on the site. The material of the doors is unknown.

## ARTEFACTS

Artefacts were scattered over a large area and were collected on the surface during the course of the investigation. These consisted of very small broken pieces of pottery, glassware, wood and metal. A few small ceramic items were found and collected in the test trenches (Fig. 14). Among the ceramic finds were three fragments of a flat-topped lid. These were once part of



Fig. 14. Designs on the ceramics found at the site.

a square pot container used for toothpaste sold under the commercial name White Rose Paste, marketed by S. Man, Son & Sons, Aldersgate, London. The pot lids



were used from about 1860 to about 1910. The design is in monochrome black with underglazed printing (Lastovica 1982:70).

Only a small quantity of animal bones was recovered and one seashell located.

### Glass

An attempt was made to sort the various types of glass fragments located according to the basic bottle nomenclature. Terms used were the neck, lip, shoulder, sidewall or body, and base (either a kick-up or not). Other fragments had either flat bases or slightly indented bases. Colour and glass-thickness also helped in the identification of the glass fragments.

Most of the glass was not identifiable, either due to its size or simply because it had too little diagnostic value. Many of the fragments appear to be iridescent (multi-coloured opalescent deposit on glass caused by chemical reaction). This is explained by the fact that the artefacts within the homestead were buried in goat manure and urine and those in surrounding areas were buried in the soil and re-exposed by erosion. Only a few shards of glass had embossing.

### Round and square bottles

No complete round bottles were found. Fragments of the round type located were used for wine, beer, gin, mineral water and possibly dip. The bottles could only be identified by the bases, necks, colour and fragment thickness of the side walls. Most of the beer-bottle shards were dark olive green or dark brown in colour. Only 65 pieces were located and of these 19 were bases. All were 6 mm thick on average.

One base had TALANA embossed on it. This bottle came from a glass company that operated near Dundee, in Natal, around 1919. There were also embossed fragments from the South African Breweries. One round bottle base was found. There was no embossed lettering but it was light green in colour and had a slightly rounded base. It could have had a marble bottle stopper and was commonly known as a 'codd bottle'. The gaseous liquid in the bottle forced the marble to the top of the neck which made it airtight (Lastovica, 1982:26). Only two fragments were located.

### Pharmaceutical bottles

These bottles were recognised by their distinctive neck, collar, colour and thickness. Only one complete bottle of this type was found.

### Kitchenware

Fragments located were the necks of preserving jars and chutney bottles, and three light blue bottle stoppers.

### Window panes

The average thickness of glass fragments is 2 mm. Most of these were found in the test trenches on the dung floor. Fragments varied in size but no pieces bigger than 60 mm were found.

### Buttons

Ten buttons of various sizes were found. One button was made of pearl embedded in a bronze jacket (Fig. 15). The largest brass button found belonged to a railway tunic. It had the Union coat of arms embossed on it.



Fig. 15. Selection of buttons found on the site.

### China doll

A single Parian arm of a doll was found. It is of a fine-grain, hard-paste porcelain which is matt white and resembles Parian marble. This type of doll is said to have been made of unglazed white clay. The forearm was attached to the upper arm by cloth so that the arm could bend at the elbow. A band notch is located at the elbow to prevent the material from slipping off the forearm, and to clamp the thread to the forearm (Lastovica, 1982:77).

### Stone artefacts

Some slate stone and slate pencil shards were located. These were found near what is believed to have been the room which Olive Schreiner occupied at Klein Gannahoek. Five slate pencil shards and five pieces of slate were uncovered (Fig. 16).



Fig. 16. Slate stone and pencils located on the site.

### Metal artefacts

Most of the metal artifacts were lying near what



is believed to have been the cart or tack cottage, south-west of the house. Artefacts found include saddle supports, horse shoes, a stirrup bar, a riding spur, a baling needle, a metal file and a ploughshare.

Cartridges were found in close proximity to the homestead and cart house. Building equipment found includes screws, nails, square bars, bolts, door locks, window latches and a section of a lantern. Domestic metal artefacts found were a kettle, tin lids, a cooking pot and fragments of a three-legged cast-iron cooking pot and a knife and fork.

### Wooden artefacts

Only two wooden sections of a door-frame were located and it is unclear as to what type of wood the door was. As the samples were in a bad state of deterioration no wood grain can be seen. It is also stained, probably after being buried in goat dung for a long period. It is possible that the wood is either yellowwood or oregon pine. Two short lengths of an architrave, measuring 1280 mm and 126 mm respectively, were located.

### Plaster

The plaster is made of mud and cow dung (dagha). It is 18 mm thick and made up of two layers. The first is a coarse layer of 16 mm bonded to the brick structure and the second layer is a finished coat of 2 mm to be covered with white-wash or lime-wash.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is believed that Olive Schreiner wrote an early version of *The Story of an African Farm* at Klein Gannahoek. The house and its setting, would we may presume, have profoundly influenced her writing. For this reason a detailed investigation of the documentary and photographic sources pertaining to Klein Gannahoek

was combined with an archaeological and architectural examination of the remains at the site. It has been possible to determine the floor plan of the house, as well as the various stages of reconstruction. Cultural material was recovered which relates to the various stages of occupation of the site. Apart from the intrinsic value of the farmhouse because of its association with Olive Schreiner, it is also an example 19th century Karoo architecture.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The archaeo-architectural investigation that was undertaken at the Klein Gannahoek site was financed by the National English Literary Museum and made possible through the active co-operation and ongoing support of the National English Literary Museum's former Director, Professor A. de Villiers and the members of Museum's Council. I am grateful to Mrs Pat Cawood of Gannahoek for granting me access to the homestead and for her kind hospitality while I was there. I should like to extend special thanks to Mr J. Binneman of the Archaeology Department at the Albany Museum for his guidance and enthusiasm in helping me with the investigation and also to Professor Guy Butler for his assistance in providing background information and slides.

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