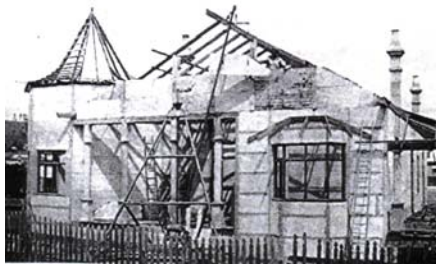


Keba (116 Abelard St): Built by Harold Eustace (then Major, later Lieutenant-Colonel) Woodman in the early 1920s. Woodman was a decorated veteran of Gallipoli and France, who afterwards worked as a district officer in New Guinea. He does not appear to have lived in this house, which from 1930 to the 1950s was a private hospital serviced by Dr Gilchrist. Since 1956 it has been a private residence.

Apart from its distinctive design, with its octagonal tower and gables, the most notable aspect of Keba is hidden from the casual observer, namely that the main fabric of the house is reinforced concrete slabs. In the 1920s, concrete was a building material much experimented with that allowed for a range of innovative techniques to be used. The building was perhaps undertaken by a friend of Woodman, possibly an engineer, who was working on the Chichester Dam at the time.

Amazingly, a full photographic record of the construction has been preserved in a parcel of photos hidden in the cellar of Keba and discovered in the 1960s by curious children. This construction involved reinforced concrete beams and pre-cast concrete slabs, with tongue & groove edges. These slabs are mostly four feet by two feet by 1½ inches thick and are reinforced with metal rods. The slabs appear to have been hoisted up using an A-frame and an old mangle as a winch. The external panels are stuccoed cement and the internal are ‘white set’ plaster.



One of Dungog's many hidden gems.



Internally the design is almost as unique as the construction method. Ceiling frames, doorways and skirting are all rosewood joinery. There is much fretwork, shelves above all doorways, picture rails in short sections, and fireplaces of brick, including one built in the round. The lounge and dining rooms are divided by a columned arch, the concrete pillars of which seemingly sit on wooden cupboards that are in fact concrete with wood panel veneer. The main part of the house has only two bedrooms, with two more bedrooms opening only onto the back verandah. On the end of the verandah is a second bathroom with a framed opening providing access between it and the bathroom - its purpose is unknown.

Built on a slope, the downstairs basement area is nearly as large as internal house floor area and includes a large concrete lined space dotted with more than a dozen columns. Even these basement columns are given a stylish finish. Also in the basement, which maintains a constant all year round temperature, can be seen imprints of newspapers from 1921, used when the concrete was poured.