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# Omro



'Omro', 230 Cotham Road  
KEW

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## Location

230 Cotham Road KEW, BOROONDARA CITY

## Municipality

BOROONDARA CITY

## Level of significance

Incl in HO area indiv sig

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO812

## Heritage Listing

Boroondara City

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - November 29, 2021

What is Significant?

The property named 'Omro', and its front garden containing a Canary Island Date Palm, at 230 Cotham Road, Kew are significant to the City of Boroondara. The house was commissioned by the internationally renowned American spirit medium William Marion Fay as a home for himself and his wife, Eliza Lydia Fay.

How is it significant?

'Omro' is of local historical, aesthetic and associative significance to the City of Boroondara.

Why is it significant?

'Omro' is of historical significance as a relatively early example of attic bungalow that represents an established development pattern of bungalow style residences referencing an informal ruralised style architecture for urban populations attracted to semi-rural areas. The house was more than likely architect-designed. (Criterion A)

'Omro' is representative of an early example of Queen Anne style attic bungalow, incorporating a covered balcony at first floor level, of the Federation-era. Featuring finely detailed red brick, render dressings, rough-cast surfaces, timber fretwork, terracotta and gablet details typical of the period, the house expertly references the informal ruralised style typified by the vernacular arising in Australia following Federation in 1901. Its setting is enhanced by a mature Canary Island Palm in the front garden, which was a popular species in the early twentieth century and appears to be an early planting. (Criterion E)

'Omro' is important for its associations with the world renowned American spirit medium William Marion Fay, a contemporary of the renowned mediums the Davenport Brothers, the 'Dean of American Magicians' Harry Kellar and famous escape artist Harry Houdini. Fay having commissioned 'Omro' as his own residence for he and his wife, Eliza Lydia Fay, in 1914. (Criterion H)

Heritage Study/Consultant Boroondara - Municipal-Wide Heritage Gap Study Volume 4: Kew, Context, 2018;

Hermes Number 117850

Property Number

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## Physical Description 1

The subject property is located within that part of Kew bordered by Cotham Road to the north and Thomas, Sackville and Davis streets to the east, south and west respectively. Bordered by Cotham Road to the north and Davis Street to the west, the property is bordered by the neighbouring properties at 232 Cotham Road and 64 Davis Street to the east and south respectively.

'Omro' is a single-storey bungalow residence, concealing an attic level with a balcony. Possessing a simple hipped roof form with tall tapering brick chimneys, the form incorporates transverse gables on the front and rear (north and south) elevations, and gablets on the east and west elevations. The transverse gables accommodate the covered first-floor balcony, on the front elevation, and a larger dormer window on the rear elevation. Constructed from finely detailed unpainted red brick, the house features render dressings, rough-cast surfaces, timber fretwork and terracotta gablet details. Given the sloped site, a lower ground floor level has been created at the rear of the house, accommodating a garage with access from Davis Street; these works are later additions. At ground floor level, the front facade is arranged as two verandahs separated by a central projecting bay accommodating a large picture window; this bay is surmounted by the covered first-floor balcony. The verandahs are accommodated beneath a continuous terracotta tile roof, which serves as an extension of the main roof. The verandah roofs are supported by a series of twin brick pillars with tapered bases, which in turn are supported on brick piers which form brick balustrades. On the verandah in the north-west corner of the house, accommodating the front door, the balustrade incorporates a curved detail topped by a painted cement capping. However, the verandah to the north-west, which provides access from the internal living areas to the garden, has a decidedly more simple and traditional

balustrade detail that suggests at the verandah being an extension of the internal living areas. At first floor, the covered balcony adopts the same twin brick details evident at ground floor level.

The house retains significant period features from its original design in the early-twentieth century, including brickwork details, timber double-hung sash windows, casement windows with arched heads, fixed lead-light glazing and terracotta finials in the shape of a dragon.

Alterations have been undertaken to the property through the subdivision of the rear garden and construction of two townhouses comprising 62 and 64 Davis Street. Minimal alterations have occurred to the house itself.

The townhouses have been constructed in what originally would have constituted the back yard. As a result, the remnant grounds of the house are restricted to the front setback. A series of mature plantings date from the establishment of the garden in 1914, one of the most notable being a large specimen of *Phoenix canariensis* (Canary Island Date Palm). While extensive hard landscaping features exist, including red brick pathways, formal garden beds and concrete paved outdoor entertainment areas, these appear to be recent additions. The front setback is screened from Cotham Road by a tall rendered masonry wall constructed in 1983 (BP 285).

*This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.*

*For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>*