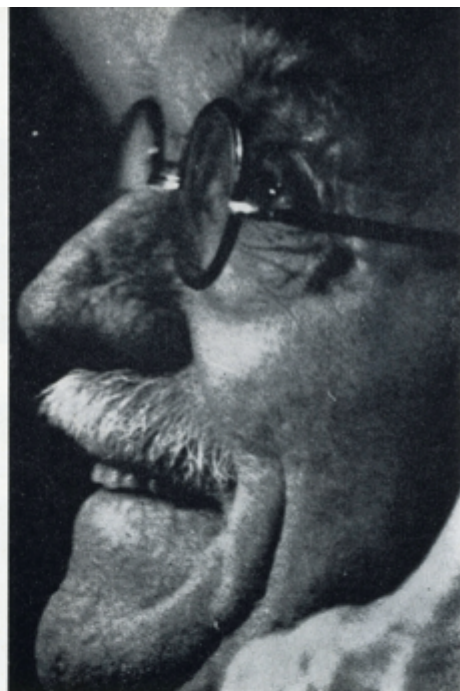




Berney Arms Mill



Mr. Harry Hewitt, who stopped the Berney Arms Mill in 1949



Repairs being carried out to the fantail

BERNEY ARMS MILL

By JOHN MYATT

AT 10.15 precisely on a cold January morning 17 years ago, Mr. Harry Hewitt stopped for the last time a windmill which for more than a century had kept 80 acres of Norfolk marshland drained to provide some of the finest cattle pasture in East Anglia. It was the end of an era for Berney Arms, five miles from Yarmouth: a new age had caught up with the tiny hamlet.

The Berney High Mill—certainly the tallest and probably the oldest marsh drainage mill in Suffolk or Norfolk—had been superseded by an electric pump.

But the mill has not out-lived its usefulness, for it has been acquired by the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works, and is being fully restored and preserved as a national monument. The aim was to complete the work by the end of last year, and certainly in time for the next summer season, when Broads holidaymakers will visit the area in their hundreds.

The work of restoration has presented the Acle firm of Thomas Smithdale and Son with special problems. Materials—including an 82 foot long beam of pitch pine to form a 'stock' on which the sails will be fitted—have had to be taken to the mill by boat, for Berney Arms cannot be reached by road. At both ends of each working day, the firm's employees faced a long trek across the marshland to a rail halt.

Mr. Hewitt, the man who stopped the mill in 1949, claims to know more of its history than any

man alive. Now aged 76, he was born and bred at Berney Arms, and left the hamlet for Yarmouth only four years ago. He now lives in a comfortable house in Century Road, Cobham, 'but I'd go back to Berney like a shot if I was a little younger,' he says.

His family looked after the mill for four generations. 'Once, when I was very young, I recall an old man telling me he could remember as a child sailing in a wherry to Breydon and watching clinker being collected to be ground into cement by the mill. That was what the mill was built for, although certainly for the last hundred years it has been used only for draining purposes,' he said.

Standing at the head of Tile Kiln Reach, on the River Yare, the mill is a landmark for miles in every direction. Her seven floors make her the highest mill in the Broadland area. Just over 70 feet in height, and with an internal diameter of 28 feet at ground level, she is made of red brick.

Breydon water as seen from the top of the mill

