

Nafford itself was a very small place, consisting of little more than a church and a mill, lying on the south bank of the river. However this seems to have been a superior church as Birlingham church was a chapel in the parish of Nafford, Birlingham still being described as a township in the parish of Nafford in the tithe award. There was a mill by the 14th century. John the miller was presented at the hundred court of Pershore for taking an excess toll in [Mich 3H4]. By the late 16th century, this belonged to the Hanford family of Woollashall, which was subsequently regarded as in Eckington, but the manor of Woollashall had perhaps been the parish of the chapel of St Catherine of the Rock, whose tithes were seized by the crown as concealed property of Pershore Abbey and passed to the Hanford family. Since they were Catholics, it is likely that they did not object to this action that was tantamount to the suppression of their parish church.

A lease of the mill is mentioned in a dispute about the fishery of the Avon in 1571 [detail]. In 1622, there was a dispute with the Russells of Strensham, who owned the mill below. In 1653, the mill (then in the occupation of William Clements) was let for three lives to John Tomson of Strensham, the lease specifically reserving navigation rights. The next lease was in 1709 to William Powell, Compton Hanford reserving a recently-made stew or fishpond and the 'overshutt' mill that he had lately erected but Powell was given the right to grind in one of the overshutt mills when his mill was flooded. Powell apparently died a couple of years later, but the mill was run by 'Dame Powell' (presumably his widow), and another William (presumably his son) until at least 1732. Joseph Osborn of Eckington leased both mills in 1747. He was followed by John Ricketts, who left in 1794 when the mills were leased to William Diston, a Tewkesbury maltster. His lease was twice renewed in the following years, lastly in 1805 for 63 years (the term suggesting that he undertook substantial building works). He became bankrupt in about 1814 after which the rent was paid by the assignees until they sold the lease to William Barnard in 1817. He was there until his death in 1842. His executor William Lloyd sold the mill to Richard and William Proctor, who were still there in 1859.

Several of the leases contained reservations for the benefit of the fishery (which was usually let to other tenants). These reveal that by 1747, there were three damhead gates, indicating that there were three waterwheels and probably three mills. Two of these were evidently the overshutt mills that had recently been built in 1709. The 1653 tenant also undertook to build a mill, so that perhaps the 1709 new mills had replaced the one that already existed in 1653. The repairing obligations in 1709 provided for then landlord to allow sufficient timber wood straw buckles luggs twigs and windings, suggesting that the roof was thatched. The 1794 lease reserved the right for the landlord to land coals, materials for building or any other effects into the storehouse and to build a further storehouse, a right not previously reserved.

Sources Worcs. RO, 705:85 BA 950/64, 1251, f.41v; *ibid.*/9, 198; *ibid.*/17, 341; *ibid.*/25, 584; *ibid.*/28, 668; b705:68 BA950/67; *ibid.*/76, *passim*.