

Bridge of Isla Woollen Mill and Croft – source data

- The Bridge over the River Isla at Rothiemay was erected in 1783 (source: OS Name Books).
- Benjamin Fearnside came to Elgin to work at the Deanshaugh Mill for Alexander Johnston – the founder of Johnston’s of Elgin. He then went into business with Robert Esson of Aberdeen. Mr Esson had a number of activities in the Aberdeenshire and Banffshire textile industry including bleaching, wool manufacturing, dyeing and the sale of finished cloth.
- Notice to debtors & creditors of Robert Catto & Robert Esson. Robert Esson has acquired rights to the debts from the Partnership (Catto is an Aberdeen Merchant) Aberdeen Press & Journal 26th October 1808.
- Notice to creditors and debtors of Esson & Fearnside of Keith – Aberdeen Press & Journal 1st & 8th August 1810. Partnership dissolved by mutual agreement on 29th June 1810 in Keith. Mr Esson to be recipient of all outstanding debts.
- Wishart, Esson & Co. launch business in Keith, dyeing and dressing of cloth, wool and yarn, will take in wool to card & spin. They have also fitted up bleaching machinery to take in cloth & yarn to bleach. Firm also seeks a spinner and weaver. Aberdeen Press & Journal 1st & 8th August 1810.
- Cullen bleachfield – notice that cloth is being laid down. Benjamin Fearnside agent for the Cullen Bleachfield Aberdeen Press & Journal 12th April 1820.
- Meeting of the Earl of Fife’s Rothiemay Farmers Society – Benjamin Fearnside among those elected as council members of the Society Aberdeen Press & Journal 20th February 1822.
- Marriage of John Fearnside woollen manufacturer Bridgetown of Isla and son of Benjamin Fearnside woollen manufacturer Bridgetown of Isla, to Isobel Smith of Cauldhame, Rothiemay on 24th April 1823.
- 1828 – Croft of Windshole, Woollen Manufactory at Bridge of Isla, Croft of land at same and customs of Fair. To Let. – Aberdeen Press & Journal 30th April 1828.
- Carding Mill and Woollen Manufactory at Bridgetown of Isla to let in Rothiemay. Aberdeen Press & Journal 25th February 1829.
- (Benjamin’s nephew, Nathan Fearnside, was in financial difficulties. A notice to creditors appeared in the Aberdeen Press & Journal 9th September 1829 stating that both he, and his investor, Alexander Smith of Portessie, were in difficulty in respect of the Carding Mill at Burn of Rathven.)
- Notice to debtors and creditors: The Trustees of Benjamin Fearnside, Manufacturer and Farmer, Bridgeton of Isla, Rothiemay request a meeting of his creditors at Mrs Conn’s Inn, Milltown of Rothiemay on Monday 28th June at 3 o’clock. Aberdeen Press & Journal 23rd June 1830.
- Windshole Farm, Woollen Manufactory and Croft to be let on a lease of sixteen years from Whit Sunday last. Aberdeen Press & Journal 28th July 1830.
- Notice to creditors of Benjamin Fearnside, Bridgetown of Isla, Rothiemay and payment of roup bills Aberdeen Press & Journal 9th February 1831. NOTE: George & Margaret Morison & family (all born Rothiemay) took Windshole Farm.
- (Thomas Fearnside, woollen manufacturer and Benjamin’s elder brother, died on 25th April 1834 at Mill of Gollachy, parish of Rathven.)
- 1841 Scotland census – Bridgetown of Isla, Rothiemay: Benjamin Fearnside, age 62, wool carder, his wife Carolina, son Thomas, Grandson Benjamin Fearnside, Grandson Charles E Stuart, Granddaughter Margaret Stuart.
- (At Mill of Gollachy, Sarah Fearnside, widow of Thomas, is noted in the census as woollen manufacturer. With her on census day are her grandson, James Fearnside who is both an apprentice and a woollen manufacturer, her daughter Grace and her daughter-in-law Jane Fearnside (nee Smith) wife of Nathan Fearnside.)
- 1842 (Notice to creditors and debtors, in both Banffshire and Aberdeen newspapers, “Nathan Fearnside Wool Manufacturer at Gollachy. All those indebted required to make immediate payment, all those to whom payment is required to lodge details with Mr Robert Faulkner, Keith, Banffshire – Aberdeen Press & Journal 23rd November 1842)
- 1851 Scotland census - Bridgetown of Isla, Rothiemay: Benjamin Fearnside, age 71, wool carder and wool spinner, master employing 2 females, his wife Caroline, Daughter Grace Fearnside, Granddaughter Sarah Stuart, Granddaughter Maria Stuart , Granddaughter Georgina Stuart.

- Bridge of Isla carding mill and croft occupied by B. Fearnside to let for a lease of nineteen years from and after Whit Sunday 1852 or for such other periods as may be agreed upon. Aberdeen Press & Journal 13th October 1852.
- 1855 Valuation Rolls: Carding Mill premises at Bridge of Isla: Proprietor/occupier: Benjamin Fearnside; Bridge of Isla Manufactory: James Fearnside: Tenant/occupier.
- Carolina Fearnside neé Montgomery: died 14th April 1858 at Back Street, Huntly, Aberdeenshire. Buried: Rothiemay Kirkyard, Banffshire. Benjamin Fearnside: died 25th November 1858 at Back Street, Huntly, Aberdeenshire. Buried: Rothiemay Kirkyard, Banffshire.
- 1861 Scotland census - Bridgetown of Isla, Rothiemay: James Fearnside Woollen Manufacturer; wife Ann Fearnside, Son Thomas Fearnside, wool spinner, Daughter Martha Fearnside, Daughter Grace Fearnside, Granddaughter Ann C Fearnside, Granddaughter Martha Fearnside, Grandson James Fearnside. Note: James Paterson, born in Elgin, Morayshire is the resident weaver.
- 1871 Scotland census – Bridgeton of Isla, Rothiemay – James Fearnside Master Woollen Manufacturer employing 6 men and 3 women; wife Ann Fearnside (neé Christie), Son Thomas Fearnside wool spinner, Daughter Martha Fearnside, Daughter Grace Fearnside, Grandson James Fearnside. Note: Alexander Butterfield is the resident weaver.
- 1875 Valuation Rolls – Bridge of Isla Woollen Factory & lands, Rothiemay. Proprietor, Tenant & Occupier: James Fearnside.
- Bridge of Isla, Rothiemay: death of Ann Fearnside (neé Christie), wife of James Fearnside, Manufacturer. Aberdeen Evening Express – 14th March 1881 and Aberdeen Press & Journal 19th March 1881.
- 1881 Scotland census - Bridge of Isla Woollen Mill, Rothiemay – James Fearnside Woollen Manufacturer, Son Thomas Fearnside wool spinner, Daughter-in-law Mary, Daughter Grace Fearnside, Grandson James Fearnside wool spinner. Alexander Butterfield is still the resident weaver.
- 1882 - Bridge of Isla Woollen Mill, Rothiemay – Death of Thomas Fearnside, son of James Fearnside and Ann Christie 22nd July 1882. Husband of (1) Jane Martin and (2) Mary Christie.
- 1883 (Newspaper notice: “Gollachy Woollen Mill, for long carried on by Nathan Fearnside, is now taken over by John Dawson, Manufacturer who will now accept offers of wool.” Banffshire Advertiser 14th June 1883). Nathan died in Gollachy village on 1st August 1883.
- 1883 – Bridge of Isla Mills, Rothiemay – From 30th December 1882 Robert Laidlaw has acquired the manufacturing business at Bridge of Isla Mills, formerly conducted by Mr J Fearnside, and is now carrying on the manufacturing of blankets, plaidings, flannels, tweeds, crumbcloth, winceys and stocking worsted etc. Wool growers and farmers can have their own wool manufactured into any of the above or have their wool carded into rows ready for home spinning. Banffshire Journal & General Advertiser 2nd January 1883.
- 1885 Valuation Rolls – Bridge of Isla Woollen Factory, Whitestone and Windshole lands (part) in Rothiemay – tenant/occupier: Robert Laidlaw.
- Acquired the business and premises of the Fife Mills in Dufftown. (More information on these mills appears under Dufftown, but their owner/manager Peter Thompson died in 1886 and his widow carried on the business for some time. Her son, William, being too young at that time to accept the responsibility – notice that Mrs Thompson will carry on the business. Banffshire Journal & General Advertiser 16th March 1886)
- 1889 Advertisement – bring wool to Bridge of Isla Mills to be manufactured into a wide range of cloths. Agents: John McKenzie, Bogie Street, Huntly and Mr J Chalmers, Cornhill – Huntly Express.
- 1891 census Adam Wilson Laidlaw, son of Robert Laidlaw, manager of the Fife Mills, Dufftown boarding with Mrs Ann Baillie in Fife Street. Meanwhile, Mr & Mrs Laidlaw remain at Bridge of Isla with children Elizabeth and John, their sister Helen having died in December 1890. Workers at the Mill are Alexander Dean from Elgin, who is foreman spinner; Mary Barclay from Huntly and Elizabeth Milne from Marnoch.
- 1895 Valuation Rolls – Woollen Factory, Bridge of Isla, Rothiemay – Proprietor James Simmie Sharpe, tenant/occupier Robert Laidlaw.
- Fashionable tweeds for winter – advertisement in the Banffshire Journal & General Advertiser 31 December 1895. Also blankets, travelling rugs, plaidings, crumbcloths, worsteds, winceys etc. All pure wool.
- Above advertisement repeated on 1 December 1896 in the same publication.
- 1899 Eldest son Robert Laidlaw died in Hawick, Roxburghshire where he was a warehouse manager. He left a widow, Agnes Scott Conacher. They had no children.
- 1901 Woollen Factory to be sold or let. The Fife Mills at Dufftown, with water rights and ground. Banffshire Journal & General Advertiser 29th January 1901

- 1901 census – Mr and Mrs Laidlaw, Woodside Cottage, Rothiemay. Alexander Dean, who was boarding with the Laidlaws, was still the spinner.
- 1901 – editorial – 25th May 1901 – Aberdeen Press & Journal . Presentation to Adam W Laidlaw of a teacher’s bible by the United Free Church Sunday School where he taught. He was also given a gift by the Dufftown Tennis Club, which he helped to form.
- 1901 Advertisement – Messrs. Robert Laidlaw & Sons have removed from the Fife Mills at Dufftown and now conduct their business at Seafield Mills, Keith. The Bridge of Isla branch continues in operation, but all bales of wool should be sent to the Keith address. 9th July 1901 - Banffshire Journal & General Advertiser. This advertisement, with the addition of an explanation of the oil-driven Crossley engine replacing water power, repeated in the Northern Times and Weekly Journal for Sutherland and the North – 3rd October and 12th December 1901.
- 1902 above advertisement repeated again in the Northern Times and Weekly Journal for Sutherland and the North – 13th March 1902 and again in the same publication 24th April 1902. Agents for the deposition of raw wool, to be sent to Keith factory, are: Mr Chalmers in Cornhill, Watt Brothers in Dufftown and in Brora, Sutherland Mr D Grant.
- 1902 Whit Sunday – 18th May 1902 – Robert Laidlaw and family leave Bridge of Isla Mill and John Smith, of the Knockando Mill Smith family, moves in.
- 1902 Advertisement Bridge of Isla Mills, Rothiemay: established as a woollen factory for over a century. John Smith, having secured the lease, is now ready to receive wool to be manufactured into all kinds of heavy woollen goods such as blankets, travelling rugs, plaidings, crumbcloths, worsteds, winceys etc. The Mill has been fitted with new and modern machinery, specially adapted for the manufacture of customer’s own wool. John Smith has over twenty years’ experience in this district.
- 1905 – 3rd June 1905 – William George Smith born at Bridge of Isla Woollen Mill, Rothiemay. Father John Smith, mother Elizabeth J Forbes. William is a younger brother to Arthur Forbes Smith (1893-1966) and Elizabeth Frances H Smith (1895-1980).
- 1906 Death of Robert Laidlaw. 25th August 1906 at his home “Gowanlea”, Drum Road, Keith. Editorial coverage: Aberdeen Journal – 28th August 1906 and Banffshire Journal & General Advertiser of the same date. His two sons - and *their* sons - continued the business at Seafield Mills in Keith for well on in the 20th century.
- 1907 – Death of Elizabeth J Smith (nee Forbes) at Bridge of Isla Woollen Mill, Rothiemay 31 May 1907.
- 4th November 1907 Fire at Rothiemay Mill - Aberdeen Press & Journal – 6th November 1907.
- 1911 Scotland census – John Smith, his second wife Mary Ann Morrison and his three children live in Huntly where Mr Smith is the manager of a wool mill there.

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