

Dan Pinchbeck

Dear Esther

Dan Pinchbeck

Dear Esther



Edited by Julian Fietkau

Dear Esther is © 2012–2016 Dan Pinchbeck and thechineseroom.

This printed version has been compiled and edited by Julian Fietkau.

The full unedited script can be found on the *Dear Esther Wikia*:

http://dearesther.wikia.com/wiki/Dear_Esther_Script

Cover illustrations: *Dear Esther*, Robert Briscoe & thechineseroom, 2012

Chapter illustrations: Becci Such, awkwardbex.weebly.com

Sheet music for *I Have Begun My Ascent*: composed by Jessica Curry,
transcribed by Michael Hitchens, michaelhitchens.com

Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors, www.openstreetmap.org/copyright

Map design: Julian Fietkau, using *Maperitive*

This book has been typeset using the L^AT_EX system originally developed by
Leslie Lamport, based on T_EX created by Donald Knuth. The *Bookman*
and *Computer Modern Typewriter* typefaces are used within.

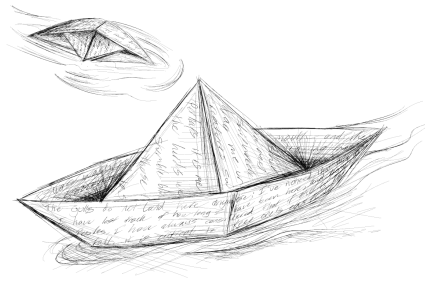
First printing, October 2016.

Printed by booksfactory.de / *PRINT GROUP Sp. z o.o.* on *Munken*
Print Cream v1.5 90 g/m² paper.

This book is **unpublished** and not intended for mass distribution.

Contents

Prologue	7
1 The Lighthouse	11
2 The Buoy	21
3 The Caves	35
4 The Beacon	41
Epilogue	53
Author's Notes	57
Editor's Notes	105



Prologue

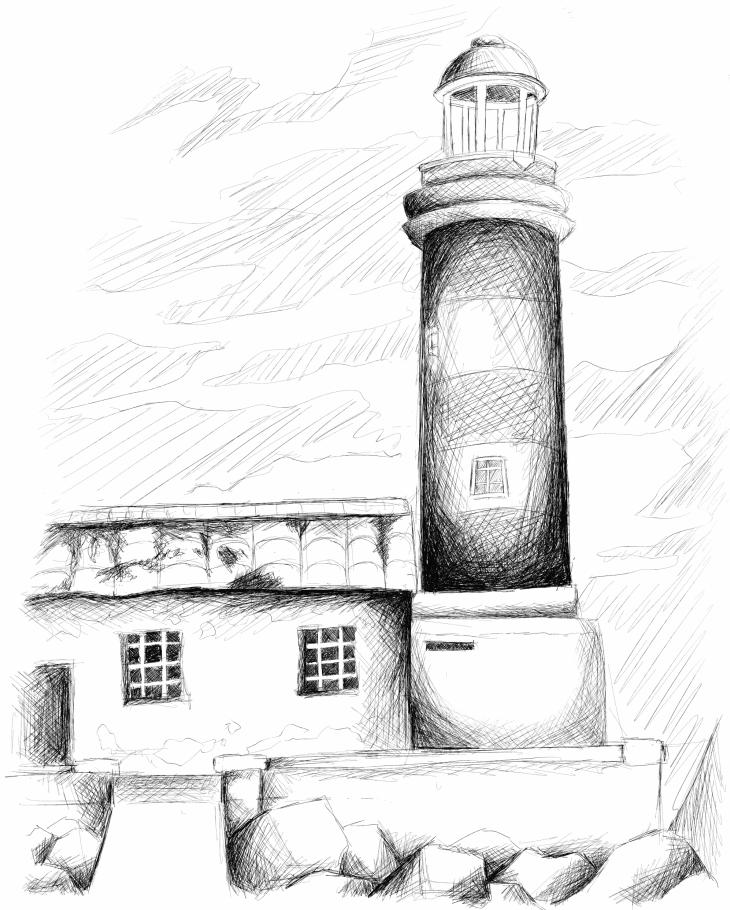
Dear Esther. The morning after I was washed ashore, salt in my ears, sand in my mouth and the waves always at my ankles, I felt as though everything had conspired to this one last shipwreck. I remembered nothing but water, stones in my belly, and my shoes threatening to drag me under to where only the most listless of creatures swim.

I sometimes feel as if I've given birth to this island. Somewhere between the longitude and latitude a split opened up, and it beached remotely here. No matter how hard I correlate, it remains a singularity, an alpha point in my life that refuses all hypothesis. I return each time leaving fresh markers that I

hope, in the full glare of my hopelessness, will have blossomed into fresh insight in the interim.

The gulls do not land here anymore; I've noticed that this year they seem to have shunned this place. Perhaps it's the depletion of the fishing stock driving them away. Perhaps it's me. When he first landed here, Donnelly wrote that the herds were sickly and their shepherds the lowest of the miserable classes that populate these Hebridean islands. Three hundred years later, even they have departed.

I have lost track of how long I have been here, and how many visits I have made overall. Certainly the landmarks are now so familiar to me that I have to remind myself to actually see the forms and shapes in front of me. I could stumble blind across these rocks, the edges of these precipices, without fear of missing my step and plummeting down to sea. Besides, I have always considered that if one is to fall, it is critical to keep one's eyes firmly open.



Chapter 1

The Lighthouse

Dear Esther. Donnelly reported the legend of the hermit, a holy man who sought solitude in its most pure form. Allegedly, he rowed here from the mainland in a boat without a bottom, so all the creatures of the sea could rise at night to converse with him. How disappointed he must have been with their chatter. Perhaps now, when all that haunts the ocean is the rubbish dumped from the tankers, he'd find more peace. They say he threw his arms wide in a valley on the south side and the cliff opened up to provide him shelter; they say he died of fever one

hundred and sixteen years later. The shepherds left gifts for him at the mouth of the cave, but Donnelly records they never claimed to have seen him. I have visited the cave and I have left my gifts, but like them, I appear to be an unworthy subject of his solitude.

At night you can see the lights sometimes from a passing tanker or trawler. From up on the cliffs they are mundane, but down here they fugue into ambiguity. For instance, I cannot readily tell if they belong above or below the waves. The distinction now seems mundane; why not everything and all at once! There's nothing better to do here than indulge in contradictions whilst waiting for the fabric of life to unravel. There was once talk of a wind farm out here, away from the rage and the intolerance of the masses. The sea, they said, is too rough for the turbines to stand: they clearly never came here to experience the becalming for themselves. Personally, I would have supported it; turbines would be a fitting contemporary refuge for a hermit: the revolution and the permanence.

When you were born, your mother told me, a hush fell over the delivery room. A great red birthmark covered the left side

of your face. No one knew what to say, so you cried to fill the vacuum. I always admired you for that; that you cried to fill whatever vacuum you found. I began to manufacture vacuums, just to enable you to deploy your talent. The birthmark faded by the time you were six, and had gone completely by the time we met, but your fascination with the empty, and its cure, remained.

Those islands in the distance, I am sure, are nothing more than relics of another time, sleeping giants, somnambulist gods laid down for a final dreaming. I wash the sand from my lips and grip my wrist ever more tightly, my shaking arms will not support my fading diaries. Reading Donnelly by the weak afternoon sunlight; he landed on the south side of the island, followed the path to the bay and climbed the mount. He did not find the caves and he did not chart the north side. I think this is why his understanding of the island is flawed, incomplete. He stood on the mount and only wondered momentarily how to descend. But then, he didn't have my reasons.

Donnelly's book had not been taken out from the library since 1974. I decided it would never be missed as I slipped it

under my coat and avoided the librarian's gaze on the way out. If the subject matter is obscure, the writer's literary style is even more so; it is not the text of a stable or trustworthy reporter. Perhaps it is fitting that my only companion in these last days should be a stolen book written by a dying man.

The mount is clearly the focal point of this landscape; it almost appears so well placed as to be artificial. I find myself easily slipping into the delusional state of ascribing purpose, deliberate motive to everything here. Was this island formed during the moment of impact; when we were torn loose from our moorings and the seatbelts cut motorway lanes into our chests and shoulders, did it first break surface then?

A wonderful sight, the moon cresting the junction between the cliff path and the stone circle. It casts a shadow of the ridge across the beach, all the world as if you had signed your name across the sand in untidy handwriting.

When someone had died or was dying or was so ill they gave up what little hope they could sacrifice, they cut parallel lines into the cliff, exposing the white chalk beneath. With the right eyes you could see them from the mainland or the fishing

boats and know to send aid or impose a cordon of protection, and wait a generation until whatever pestilence stalked the cliff paths died along with its hosts. My lines are just for this: to keep any would-be rescuers at bay. The infection is not simply of the flesh.

They were godfearing people, those shepherds. There was no love in the relationship. Donnelly tells me that they had one bible that was passed around in strict rotation. It was stolen by a visiting monk in 1776, two years before the island was abandoned altogether. In the interim, I wonder, did they assign chapter and verse to the stones and grasses, marking the geography with a superimposed significance; that they could actually walk the bible and inhabit its contradictions?

We are not like Lot's wife, you and I; we feel no particular need to turn back. There's nothing to be seen if we did. No tired old man parting the cliffs with his arms; no gifts or bibles laid out on the sand for the taking. No tides turning or the shrieking gulls overhead. The bones of the hermit are no longer laid out for the taking: I have stolen them away to the guts of this island where the passages all run to black, and there we can

Editor's Notes

Throughout the existence of *Dear Esther*, one of the most commonly heard criticisms has been that it would have been better suited to a different medium, that it should have been created for example as a book or a movie instead of a computer game. I have always disagreed vehemently, and continue to do so. *Dear Esther*, as created by *thechineseroom*, is a unique interactive audiovisual experience that benefits tremendously from its interactivity: you can traverse the island at your own pace, find your own path, explore every nook or rush to the finish line, and the narration will be different every time. I wholeheartedly recommend sitting down with the game and experiencing Robert Briscoe's breathtaking environments and Jessica Curry's haunting music alongside Dan Pinchbeck's writing (with the narration performed by Nigel Carrington). An enormous amount of talent came together to create the game, and it definitely deserves to be experienced as a unit.

That being said, whether the game's writing would be able to convey its atmosphere even without all those complementing elements is a question that has intrigued me for a while. Wanting to see how well the script would stand on its own was the initial spark for this little project. Maybe this will be an opportunity to show it to people who would be opposed to the idea of playing a video game at all.

Of course there are additional reasons for this endeavour. *Dear Esther* never saw a boxed release, but even if it had, I

am personally not too fond of those giant cardboard boxes that games often use to stand out on store shelves. Keeping it as a small book like this is, in my view, a fitting way to dedicate a respectful amount of physical space to it. In addition, it provided me with a practical exercise in typesetting – something that I had always wanted to try.

If I have been successful in regards to the editing of the script and the design of this book, then I hope it will not look too amateurish next to professionally published works. Nonetheless, this is a mere personal project that will at best see a tiny print run. I expect these words to only ever be read by close friends and family. If this book somehow finds its way to you even though you do not know me, then I hope everyone involved has acted in good faith. (If you have paid any money for it, then something has gone gravely wrong.)

There are several small changes between the *Dear Esther* script provided in this book and the one you would hear while playing the game. Some of them are necessary due to the different medium, others are a matter of personal taste. I will give a brief overview of what I changed and why.

First and foremost, the game is designed to provide the player with different narration if it is played several times. In some cases, this would mean a random choice between several similar pieces of narration. By virtue of the paper on which it is printed, the book does not have that luxury, so I combined and restructured those pieces of narration in a way that hopefully

keeps unintended repetition to a minimum, yet also conveys as much of the content as possible.

In the game, it is possible to encounter various bits of narration in a different order depending on where the player ventures first. It is also possible to miss some of them entirely. With that in mind, I have taken the liberty to rearrange a few of the paragraphs in order to achieve a slightly smoother flow. *Dear Esther* is chock-full of references to other parts of the text, both backwards and forwards, and I have done my best to ensure a well-structured reading experience without taking away from the chaotic and at times rambling feel of the narration in the game.

Several pieces of the narration start with the iconic phrase “Dear Esther”. I have made sure that each chapter and subchapter starts this way. In the original script, almost all of them already did, and its omission in only one or two places seemed to project more of an unintended significance in print.

Finally, I have made a few very minor changes to sentence structure and punctuation, and corrected two grammatical errors that appeared in the original script.

It is not my place to judge whether this printed version of the script conveys the same atmosphere as the game. However, I will point out that this version does away with all the pauses in between bits of narration that are present in the original. It is possible that this change exacerbates the appearance of the individual pieces as erratic rambling, particularly during the later acts as the narrator loses the grip on his sanity. Looking

back, I do not believe that this form changes the impact of the text very much, especially considering that Nigel Carrington's passionate narration is absent in this version, but conveys the same effect in the game.

A few words should be written about the geography of *Dear Esther*. The entirety of the game takes place on a small Hebridean island that is, to the best of my knowledge, entirely fictional. However, several references are made to real-life cities in south-west England, most of them connected by the M5 motorway running from Exeter all the way to Birmingham.

Several times throughout the text, the narrator refers to Sandford Junction, which is junction 21 of the M5. However, he is seemingly unable to pinpoint the exact location of the car accident, noting that it should be "somewhere between the turn off for Sandford and the Welcome Break services" (which would be further north).

In one short scene during the game, the player gets a brief opportunity to explore the crash site. It includes a sign saying "M5 A 144.4" which in reality can be found at M5 junction 19, just outside Bristol. This makes it the most likely candidate for the actual crash site, even though it does not fit the "twenty-one" motif. A map showing junction 19 and its surroundings has been included at the end of this book.

In a blog article³ from February 14th, 2014, the author him-

³ <http://www.thechineseroom.co.uk/blog/blog/dear-esther-two-years-in-part-one>

self notes: “There are some factual inaccuracies in the game, particularly about the existence (or not) of a Welcome Break service station at the Sandford junction of the M5. I apologise for this. *Dear Esther* was, if nothing else, a lesson in how amazing the impromptu detective skills of gamer communities are and that they really care about detail.”

In closing, I hope that this slightly edited version of *Dear Esther* and the included additional material bring you as much joy as the game brought me. If you like the writing, I can only encourage you once more to give the original game a proper chance, and to support its creators in their current and future endeavours. Thank you very much!

I Have Begun My Ascent

Dear Esther

Composed by Jessica Curry

Transcribed by Michael Hitchens

michaelhitchens.com

Slow but proud

Piano

f *mf*

9

Pno.

17

Vlcs.

mf

Pno.

27

Vlcs.

Pno.

35

Vlns. 1

Vlns. 2

Vlas.

Vlcs.

Pno.

mf

mf

mf

mf

mf

Detailed description: This system of musical notation covers measures 35 to 37. It features five staves: Violins 1 (Vlns. 1), Violins 2 (Vlns. 2), Viola (Vlas.), Violoncello (Vlcs.), and Piano (Pno.). The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). In measure 35, Vlns. 1 plays a half note G4, Vlns. 2 is silent, Vlas. plays a half note G3, Vlcs. plays a half note G2, and Pno. plays a half note chord of G2-B1. In measure 36, Vlns. 1 plays a half note A4, Vlns. 2 plays a sixteenth-note pattern (A4-G4-F4-E4-D4-C4), Vlas. plays a half note G3, Vlcs. plays a half note G2, and Pno. plays a half note chord of G2-B1. In measure 37, Vlns. 1 plays a half note B4, Vlns. 2 continues the sixteenth-note pattern, Vlas. plays a half note G3, Vlcs. plays a half note G2, and Pno. plays a half note chord of G2-B1.

38

Vlns. 1

Vlns. 2

Vlas.

Vlcs.

Pno.

Detailed description: This system of musical notation covers measures 38 to 40. It features five staves: Violins 1 (Vlns. 1), Violins 2 (Vlns. 2), Viola (Vlas.), Violoncello (Vlcs.), and Piano (Pno.). The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). In measure 38, Vlns. 1 plays a half note B4, Vlns. 2 plays a sixteenth-note pattern (B4-A4-G4-F4-E4-D4-C4), Vlas. plays a half note G3, Vlcs. plays a half note G2, and Pno. plays a half note chord of G2-B1. In measure 39, Vlns. 1 plays a half note C5, Vlns. 2 continues the sixteenth-note pattern, Vlas. plays a half note G3, Vlcs. plays a half note G2, and Pno. plays a half note chord of G2-B1. In measure 40, Vlns. 1 plays a half note D5, Vlns. 2 continues the sixteenth-note pattern, Vlas. plays a half note G3, Vlcs. plays a half note G2, and Pno. plays a half note chord of G2-B1.

40

Vlns. 1

Vlns. 2

Vlas.

Vlcs.

Pno.

42

Vlns. 1

Vlns. 2

Vlas.

Vlcs.

Pno.

48

Vlns. 1

Vlns. 2

Vlas.

Vlcs.

Pno. *mf*

56

Vlcs.

Pno.

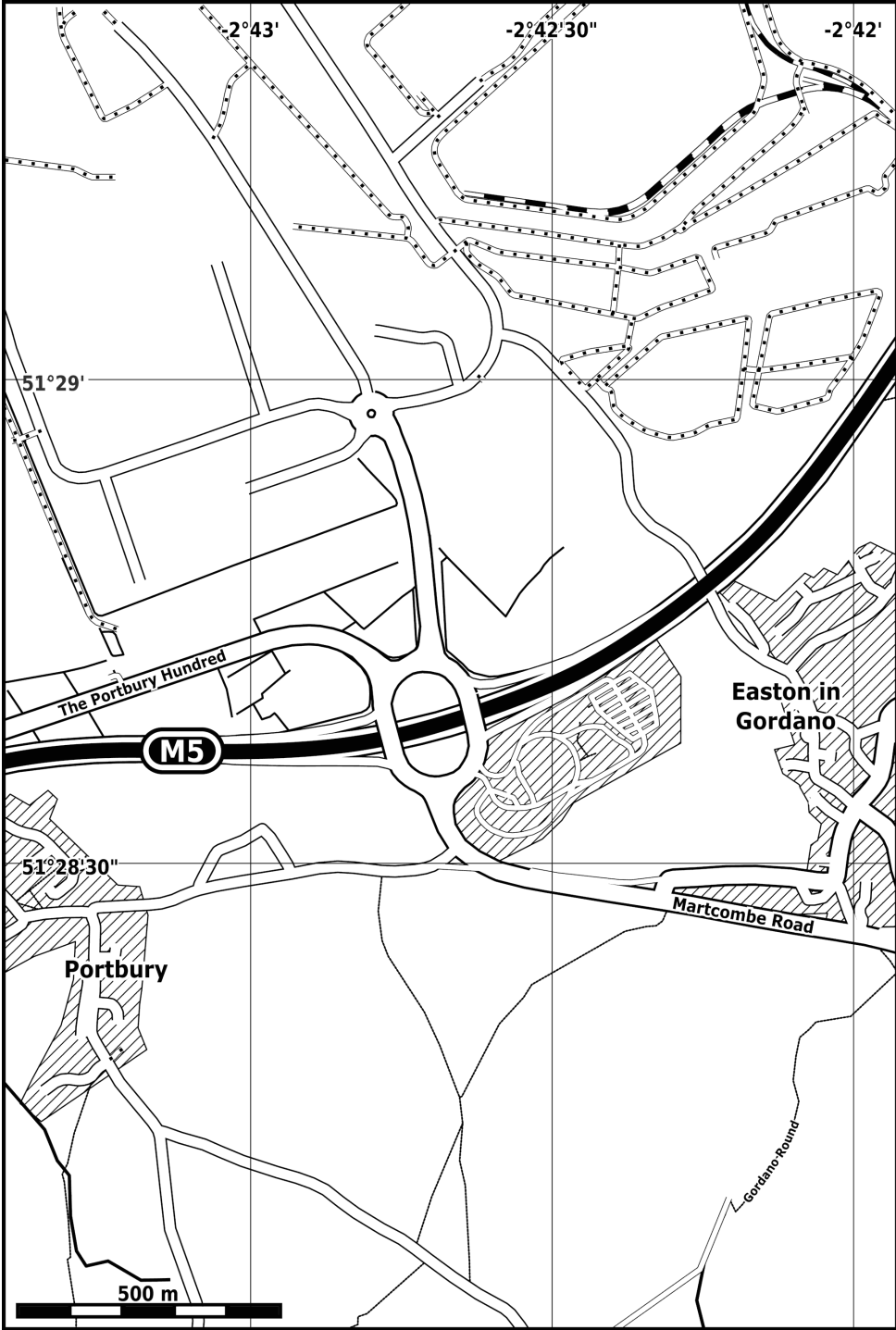
63

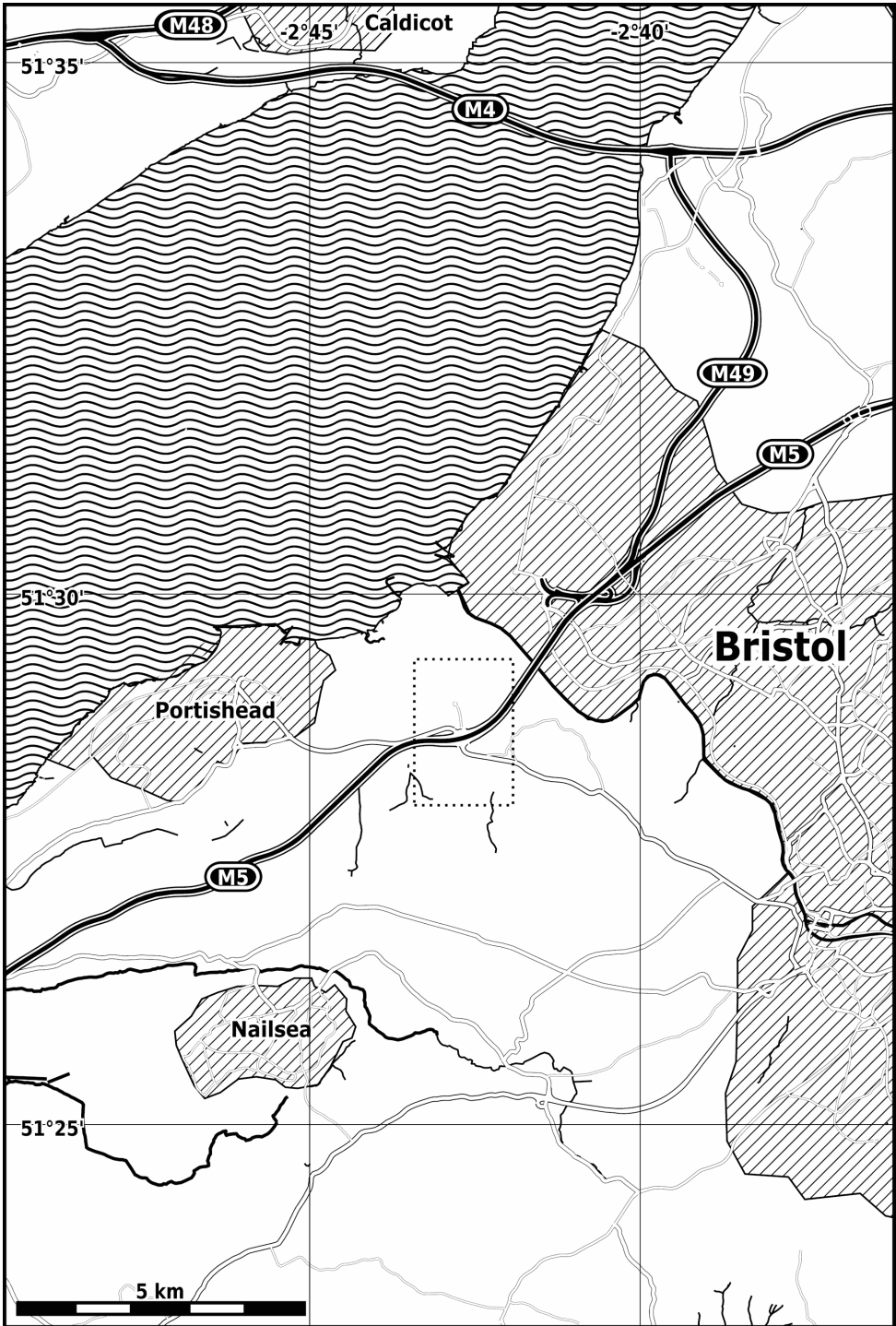
Vlcs.

Pno.

72

Pno.





¹And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, ²And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

³And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: ⁴And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

⁵And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. ⁶And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

⁷And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. ⁸And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. ⁹And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.

Acts 9, New Testament, King James Version