
4 Conclusions by *Paul Johnson and Colleen Batey*

The various campaigns of geophysical survey at The Earl's Bu and its environs have undoubtedly added to the corpus of information already known from the site. In some cases, the surveys have raised more questions than they have answered, particularly those of the putative burnt mounds in the West Field. It is often impossible to be definitive in the interpretation of geophysical anomalies, especially in Scottish contexts where geological conditions are often unhelpful in the application of archaeological geophysical survey, and it is always tempting to interpret on the basis of archaeological recognition of shape and dimension. This is a wholly subjective process which can lead the unwary to false conclusions. The transliteration from 'geophysical anomaly' to 'archaeological feature' is difficult and relies heavily upon the ability to understand the physical responses likely to be created by subsurface archaeological features as well as a knowledge of which archaeological features are likely to occur in the area of interest. Interpretation must be an informed process, and in the case of the environs of the Earl's Bu, if it were not for the excavations that

were being run concurrently with the surveys, and the excellent and rapidly-published research of people such as Steve Dockrill and John Gater, that interpretative process would have been far more difficult. Clearly more excavation of geophysical anomalies is required. If we take Dockrill and Gater's burnt mound sites to be geophysical 'type sites' then the anomalies in the West Field do not readily conform to the type, but a badly disturbed burnt mound may be too difficult to distinguish from a stone-dense midden spread or similar anomaly.

These different surveys at the Earl's Bu have provided indicative information, confirming considerable disturbance and potential structural traces; the next logical stage is to excavate prior to the laying-out of the site for comprehension by the visiting public. The geophysical survey has however indicated a number of features which may represent early excavation trenches (discussed in [Batey 2003](#)) such as on [Illus 7](#), features 18 and 19. These have been plotted out elsewhere (in [illus 16](#) of [Batey 2003](#)) in an attempt to identify the location of some of the antiquarian activities at the site.