



**Hydraulics Research**  
Wallingford

FLOW IN CULVERTS

Interim Review

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## PREAMBLE

Hydraulics Research Ltd. are carrying out a series of investigations of the performance of river structures. This research is sponsored by the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food (MAFF). One of these investigations concerns the performance of culverts. The stimulus for this investigation was the apparent lack of information on the roughness values to be used for modern sectional pre-cast concrete culverts. The preliminary stage to the investigation was a literature search and collection of prototype evidence. The literature search showed that there was an immense body of work on the subject of culverts but that much of it was fragmented. The available information on culverts is therefore being collected together in an attempt to relate the various threads of research and ascertain whether other questions arise on the performance of culverts than the one originally posed. This interim report reviews the general analysis of culverts and some of the research into culvert entries. A bibliography is also included of research sources not yet reviewed.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Culverts can be described in general terms as relatively short pipes used to pass flood plain flows or open water courses through obstructions such as a road or rail embankment. Flow through a culvert may be free surface or full pipe flow or may change from one to the other within the discharge range.

The type of flow depends on a number of factors - the headwater and tailwater levels, the length, the slope, the roughness and the inlet geometry. Consequently, the flow characteristics can be very complex. In some cases, the culvert capacity can be calculated accurately; in others, laboratory investigations may be necessary to determine the stage/discharge characteristics.

## 2. TYPES OF CULVERT FLOW

Research into culvert flow has identified six principal types of flow. These are illustrated in Fig 1. The flow types are identified by the following descriptions.

Type 1: The inlet is not submerged, bed slope is steep enough to maintain supercritical flow throughout the culvert length and tailwater is not high enough to submerge the outlet. The control section is then at the inlet or just inside the inlet where critical depth occurs, assuming that the approach flow is subcritical (the usual case). Equating energy levels at the control section and a section in the approach, allowing for head losses at the culvert entry, will give the headwater level. This may be above the culvert entry soffit but research has shown that with a conventional entry geometry, the water surface will not touch the soffit for headwater levels up to 1.2 times the height of the culvert entry or, in some cases, up to 1.5 times the height of the culvert entry.

Type 2: For this type of flow, the tailwater level at the culvert outlet is below the critical depth line but the bed slope is not great enough to sustain critical flow down the culvert and the water surface is therefore above the critical depth line. The control section is therefore at the culvert outlet at the point of critical depth. Unlike Type 1, the roughness of the culvert becomes a factor in determining the headwater

level to discharge relationship.

Type 3: This is a similar condition to Type 2 but the tailwater is above the critical depth line and the control section is downstream of the culvert outlet.

Type 4: Both inlet and outlet are submerged and the culvert runs full. The headwater to discharge relationship is controlled by the tailwater level.

Type 5: In this type of flow the inlet is submerged while tailwater is below the crown of the outlet. The control section is at the inlet where the flow pattern is similar to that downstream of a sluice gate and the discharge is determined by the upstream head level above the culvert inlet and the area of the contracted flow. Whether this flow condition will persist depends on the slope, length and roughness of the culvert. As the flow is retarded by the roughness it will expand at a rate influenced by the slope. If the water surface touches the crown of the culvert before the outlet then the flow will extract the air upstream of the seal and the pipe will run full.

Type 6: This type of flow is the alternative to Type 5; the inlet is submerged and the tailwater is below the crown of the outlet but the pipe runs full. In this condition the operating head is the height from the headwater level to the tail of the culvert and the

discharge is higher than for Type 5 flow.

Although this list covers the principal types of flow, it is not exhaustive. For example, if the culvert is steep and the tailwater level high the inlet may be unsubmerged while the lower end of the culvert runs full or, a variation of Type 6 flow, the water surface may fall below the crown at a point upstream of the outlet. Further variations occur if the culvert has a break in slope midway along its length.

### 3. CALCULATION OF CULVERT FLOW

For Type 1 flow, critical depth at the entry is assumed and therefore minimum specific energy. At this point:

$$Q^2/g = A^3/B \quad (1)$$

where  $Q$  = discharge

$g$  = acceleration due to gravity

$A$  = cross-sectional area of flow at critical depth

$B$  = water surface width at critical depth

To relate the headwater level to discharge an energy balance is carried out between the entry of the culvert and a section in the approach:

$$d_c + V_c^2/2g = h + V^2/2g - h_f - h_e \quad (2)$$

where  $d_c$  = critical depth

$V_c$  = critical velocity

$h$  = upstream water surface level above culvert invert

$V$  = velocity in approach section

$h_f$  = friction head between approach section and entry

$h_e$  = head loss at entry

These two equations are solved by successive approximations. Friction head will normally be small and not easy to calculate in this condition of rapidly varying flow and is therefore commonly omitted. In all

culvert calculations the determination of the entry loss can be difficult. This is referred to later.

When Type 2 flow occurs, Equation 1 still applies but the friction loss along the culvert has to be included in Equation 2.

In effect, a backwater calculation has to be carried out along the culvert from the estimated critical depth at the outlet to establish the depth at the culvert inlet and repeated until the equations are satisfied. This is an extremely tedious process to carry out by hand but is relatively simple with the aid of a microcomputer or programmable calculator. A simplified method using graphical aids is given by Carter (Ref.2).

Computation of Type 3 flow follows the same process as that for Type 2 flow except that the estimated discharge/tailwater level relationship in the latter is determined by the critical flow condition while in the former it is by a backwater calculation from a control section in the tailwater channel.

For Type 4 flow, calculation of the headwater level/discharge relationship is a straightforward solution of the energy equation between the headwater and tailwater sections. In this case, head loss due to friction poses no problems since the cross-sectional area and hydraulic mean depth are constant.



If Type 5 flow occurs, calculation of the headwater level /discharge relationship is apparently a single step application of an orifice equation. However, occurrence of this type of flow depends upon a number of factors that are difficult to evaluate. Length, slope and roughness all play a part and the inlet geometry is a particularly influential factor. Carter (Ref.2) has prepared charts which may be used to distinguish roughly between Type 5 and Type 6 flow for concrete or corrugated metal culverts with strictly defined entry geometry. The chart for concrete pipes is reproduced in Fig 2.

When Type 5 flow is identified, the discharge is calculated from the standard orifice equation:

$$Q = C A \sqrt{2gh} \quad (3)$$

where C = Coefficient of discharge

A = Cross sectional area of inlet

g = acceleration due to gravity

h = upstream head

Discharge calculations for Type 6 flow are carried out as for Type 4 flow except that tailwater level is taken as the crown of the outlet on the assumption that critical depth is at or close to the crown. This may not be the case, however; the pipe may still run full even though the critical depth is measurably below the crown. In this situation, tailwater level above the

invert can be approximated as half the sum of critical depth and culvert height.

#### 4. ENTRY LOSSES AT CULVERTS

Entry geometry can have a dramatic effect on the performance of a culvert; a more efficient entry design may allow the use of a culvert of smaller area with significant cost savings. Each design of entry must however be laboratory or field tested to confirm its performance. Since there are innumerable permutations of design features and because tests are often carried out for a specific application it is extremely difficult to generalise on the subject of entry losses.

Entry loss coefficients are commonly expressed in two ways, as a fraction of the reference velocity head (say K) or as a coefficient of discharge C applied to the energy equation in the form:

$$Q = C \times \text{Area} \times \sqrt{2g \times \text{Effective head}} \quad (4)$$

The relation between the two forms is:

$$K = 1/C^2 - 1 \quad (5)$$

For the simple case of a circular pipe set flush into a vertical wall the entry loss coefficient will range from 0.15 when the pipe is running half full to 0.5 when on the point of submergence. These values will fall to half or less if the entry is rounded to a radius of between 10 and 15 percent of the entry diameter.

The coefficient of discharge for the equation for

Type 5 flow will vary from 0.45 to 0.6 as head rises if the head is measured from the invert. However, for relatively low heads it is preferable to measure the head to the centre of the orifice when the coefficient will remain virtually constant at 0.6 when the entry has a square edge. Rounding the edges of the entry will raise this value to 0.75.

More detailed information on entry losses and friction coefficients can be found in references 1 to 8.

## 5. FIELD DATA

Initial enquiries to Water Authorities on the subject of culvert studies elicited a positive response from Yorkshire Water Authority who had set up a water level monitoring system on Batley Beck in Dewsbury. This Beck runs through a heavily built-up area and passes through numerous culverts, particularly under roads.

An initial inspection of the culverts was made and a location plan is shown in Fig. 3. Photographs of all culverts within a selected reach are shown in Plates 1 to 30.

Not all the culverts are suitable for investigation. A number will be selected and studied more fully on the basis of prototype data on head losses and flows.

A certain amount of water level data has already been acquired and further data is awaited.

## 6. LABORATORY TESTS

A laboratory investigation specifically aimed at determining losses at culvert barrel steps and discontinuities is at the planning stage for construction during 1989.

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**FIGURES.**





TYPE	EXAMPLE	TYPE	EXAMPLE
<b>1</b> CRITICAL DEPTH AT INLET $\frac{h_1 - z}{D} < 1.5$ $h_4/h_c < 1.0$ $S_0 > S_c$		<b>4</b> SUBMERGED OUTLET $\frac{h_1 - z}{D} > 1.0$ $h_4/D > 1.0$	
<b>2</b> CRITICAL DEPTH AT OUTLET $\frac{h_1 - z}{D} < 1.5$ $h_4/h_c < 1.0$ $S_0 < S_c$		<b>5</b> RAPID FLOW AT INLET $\frac{h_1 - z}{D} > 1.5$ $h_4/D \approx 1.0$	
<b>3</b> TRANQUIL FLOW THROUGHOUT $\frac{h_1 - z}{D} < 1.5$ $h_4/D \approx 1.0$ $h_4/h_c > 1.0$		<b>6</b> FULL FLOW FREE OUTFALL $\frac{h_1 - z}{D} > 1.5$ $h_4/D \approx 1.0$	

Fig 1 Types of culvert flow

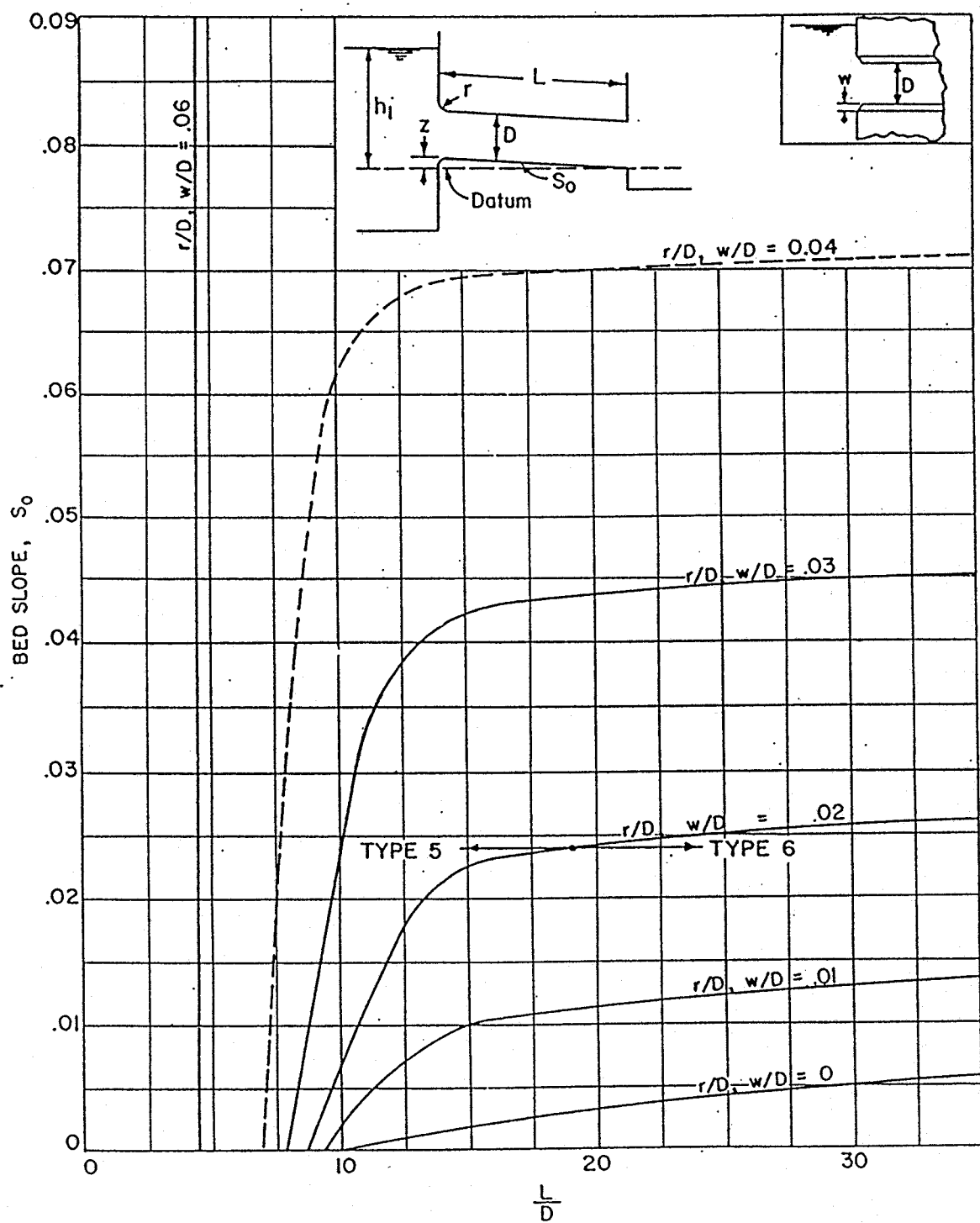


Fig 2 Criteria for types 5 and 6 flow in box or pipe culverts

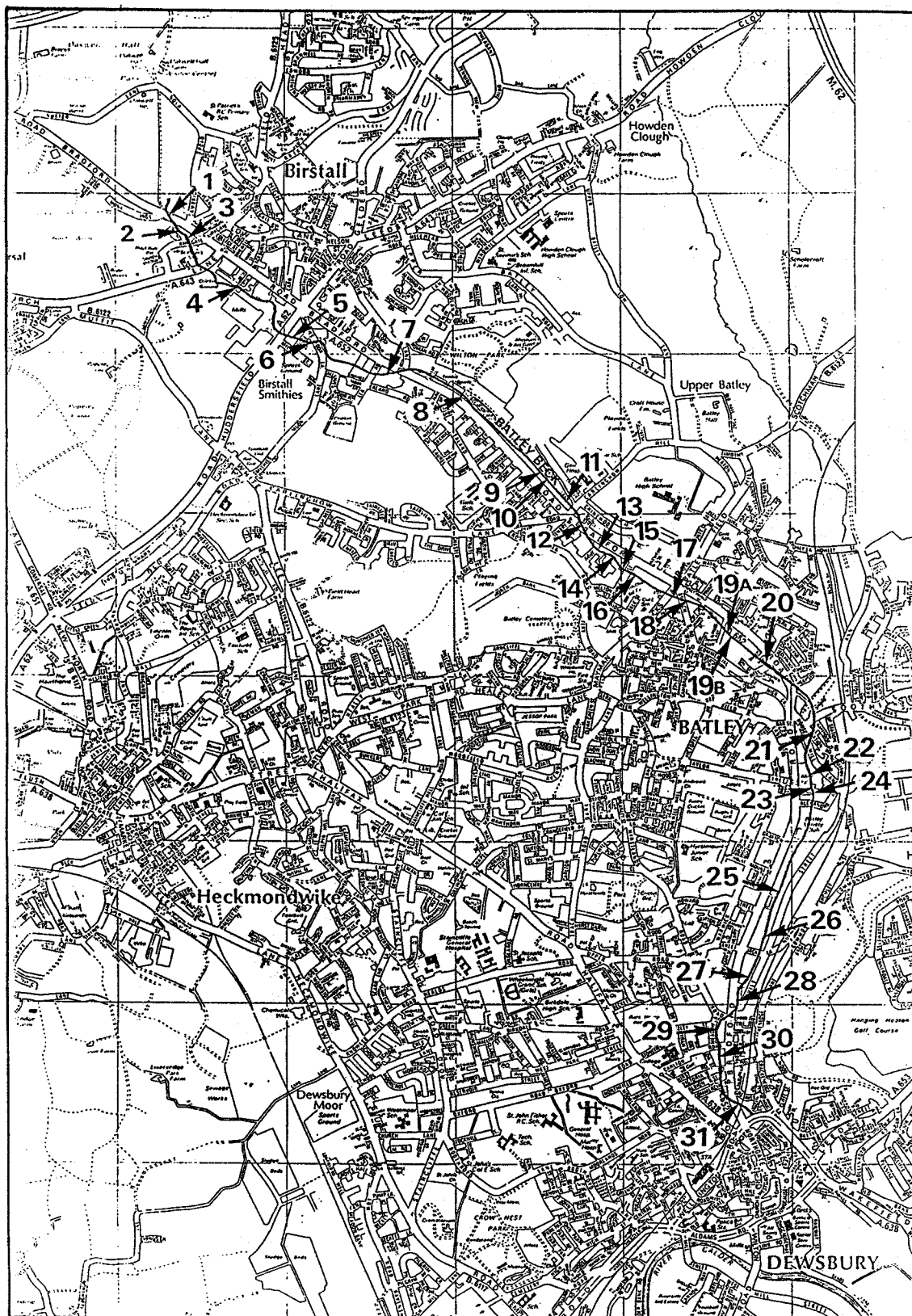


Fig 3 Location plan of culverts on Batley Beck



## PLATES.





PLATE 1

CULVERT No.1 (Inlet above - Outlet below)

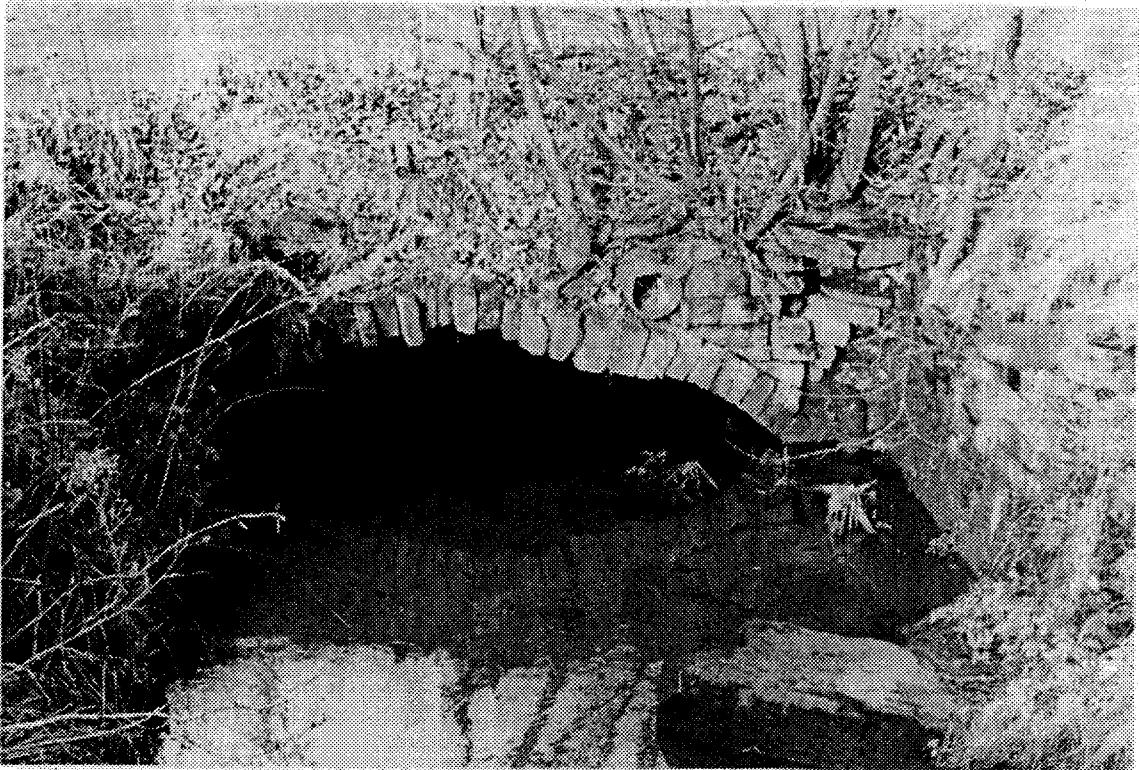
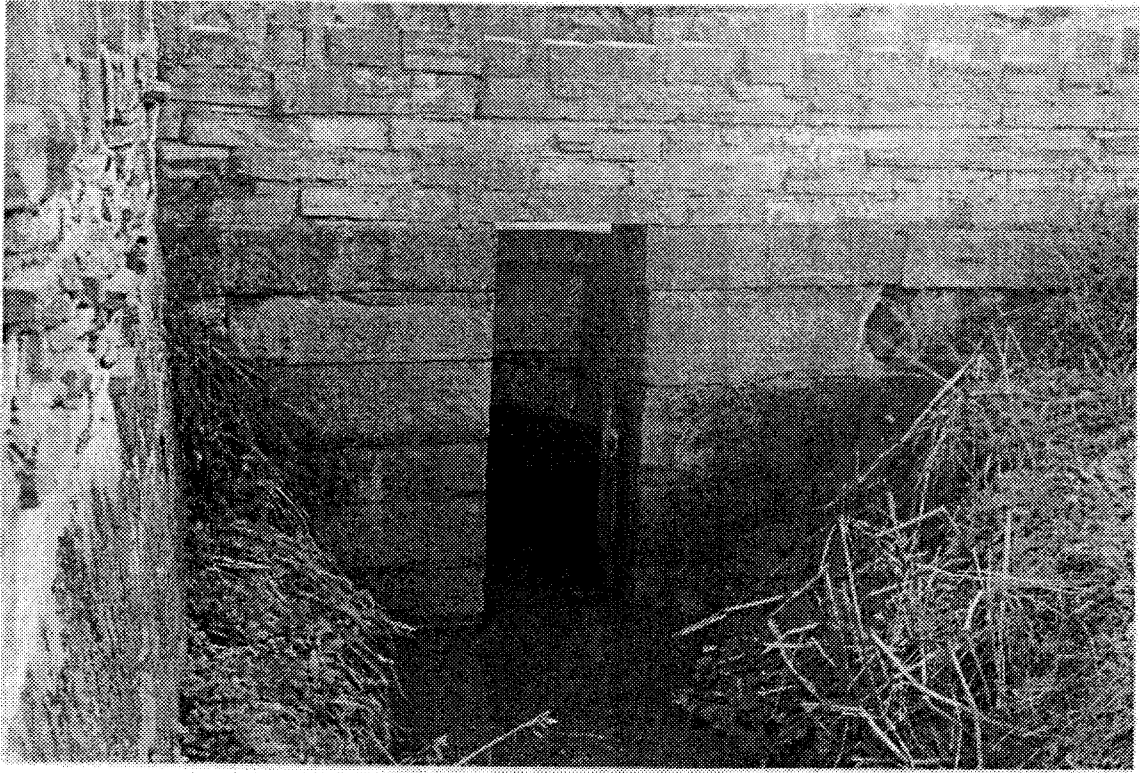


PLATE 2

CULVERT No.2 (Inlet above - Outlet below)



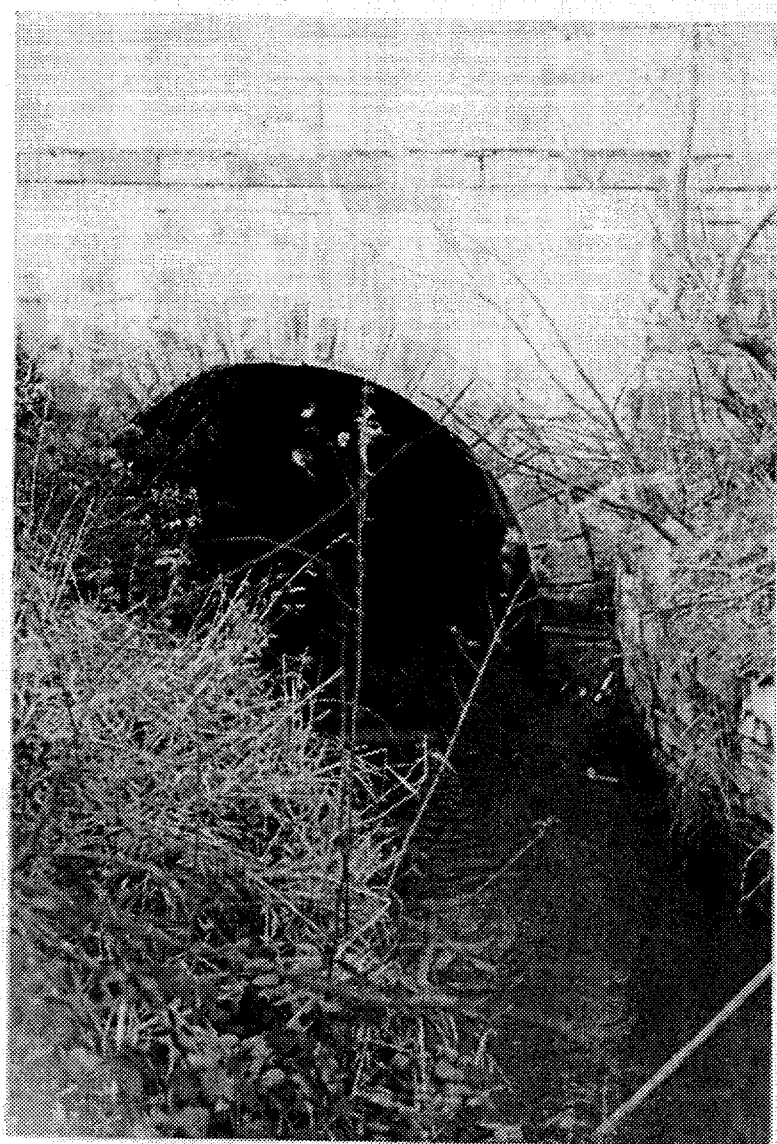


PLATE 3      CULVERT No.3      (Inlet above - Outlet below)

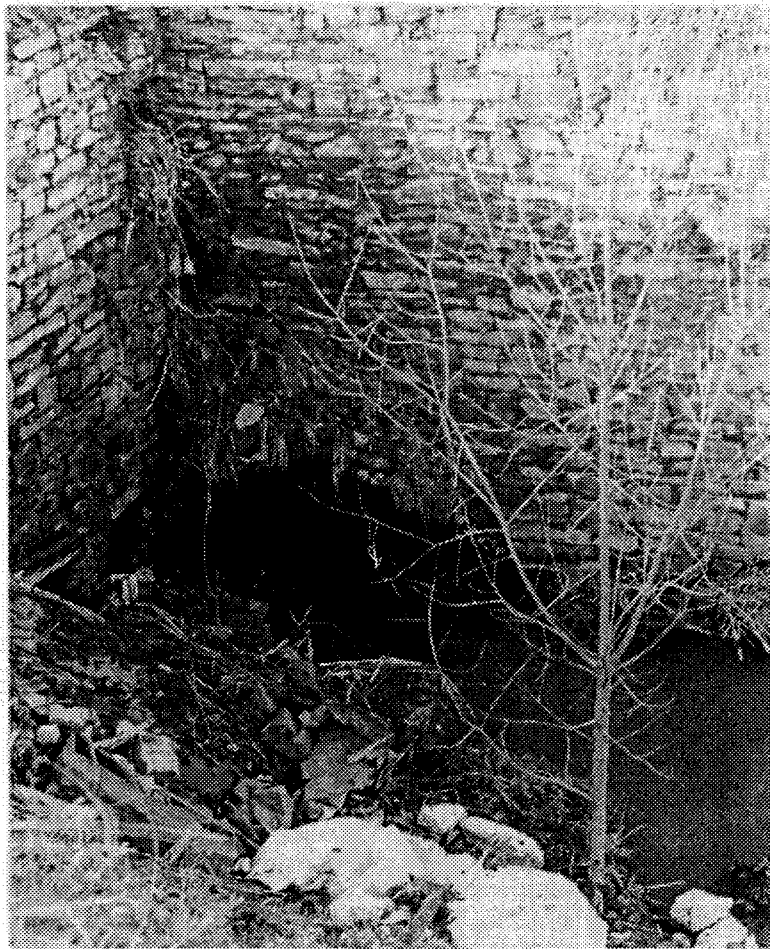


PLATE 4      CULVERT No.4      (Inlet above - Outlet below)

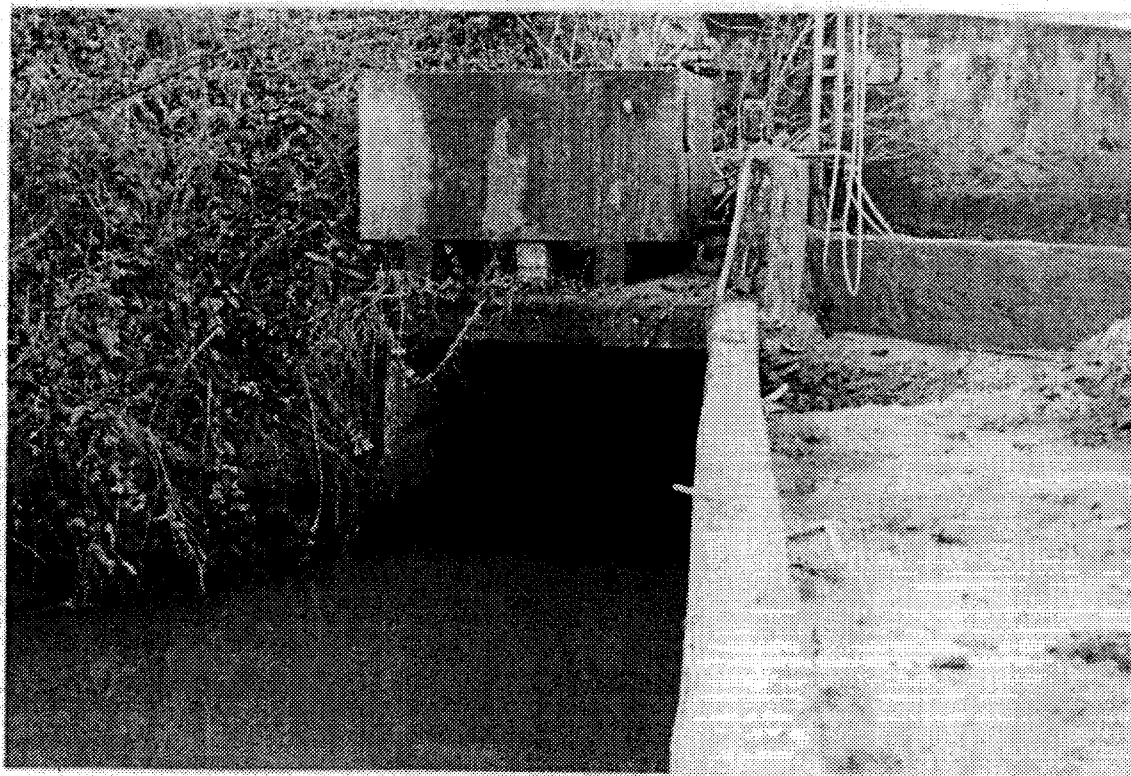
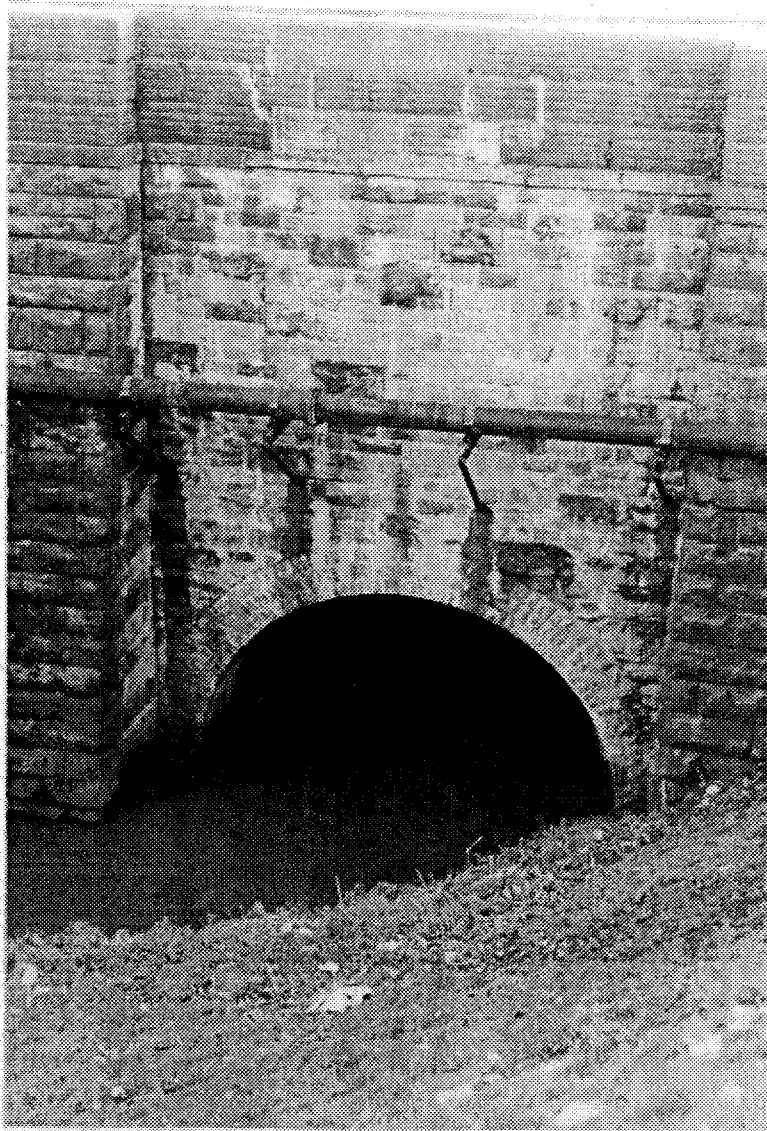


PLATE 5      CULVERT No.5      (Inlet above - Outlet below)





PLATE 6      CULVERT No.6      (Inlet above - Outlet below)



PLATE 7      CULVERT No. 7      (Inlet above - Outlet below)



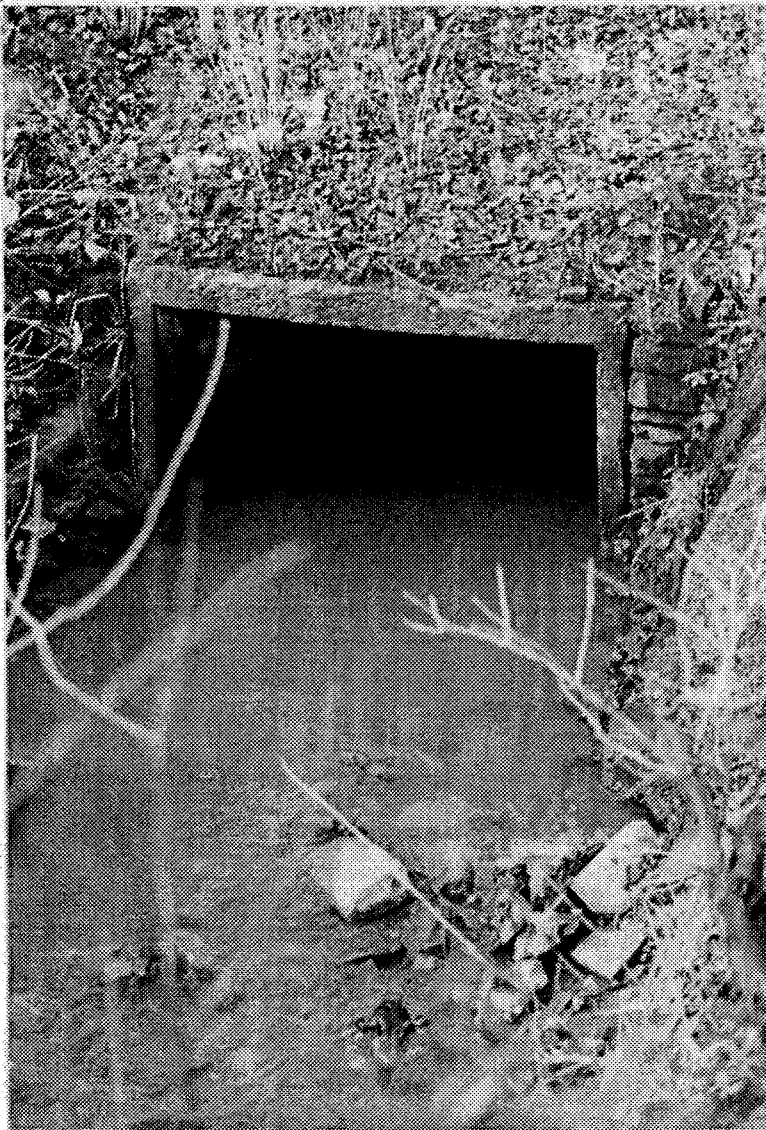


PLATE 8      CULVERT No. 8      (Inlet above - Outlet below)

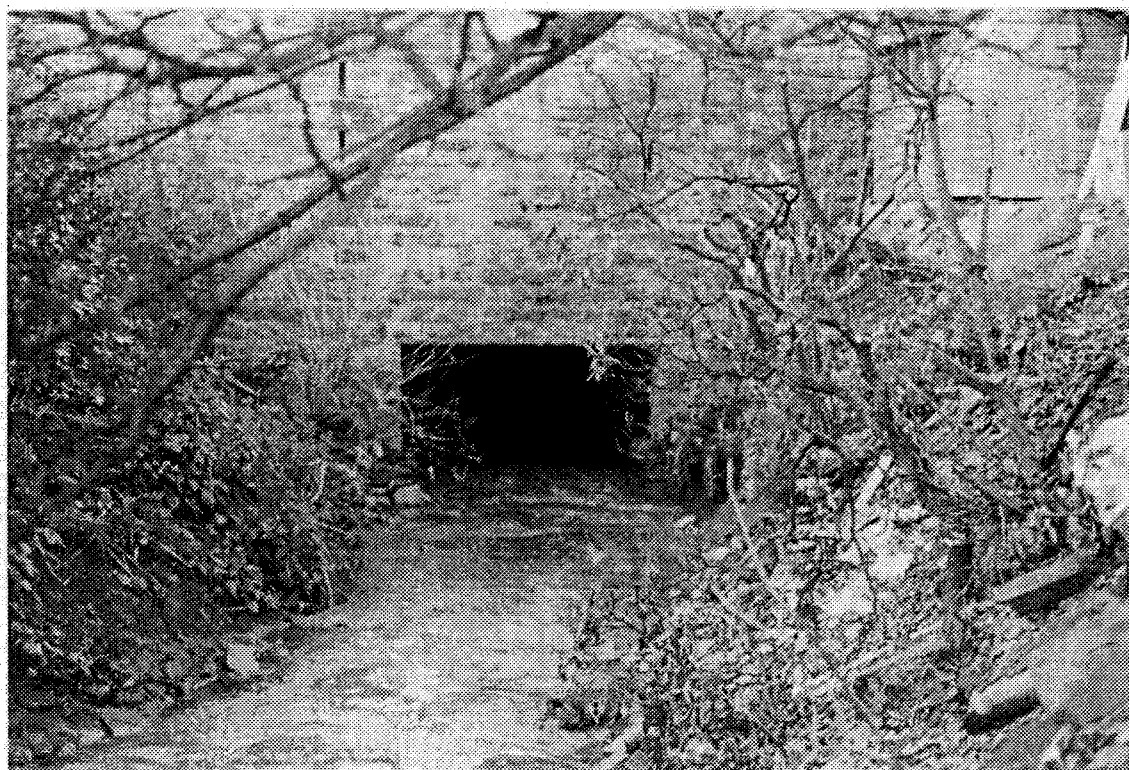


PLATE 9      CULVERT No.9      (Inlet above - Outlet below)

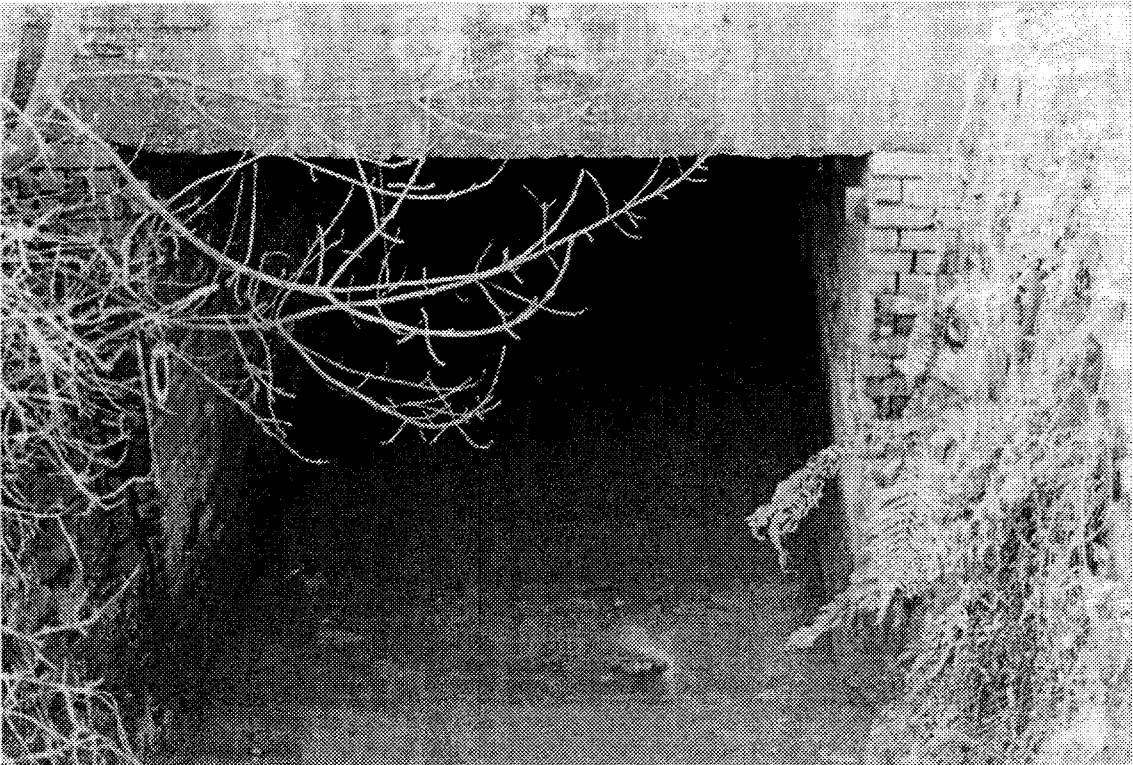


PLATE 10      CULVERT No.10 (Inlet above - Outlet below)



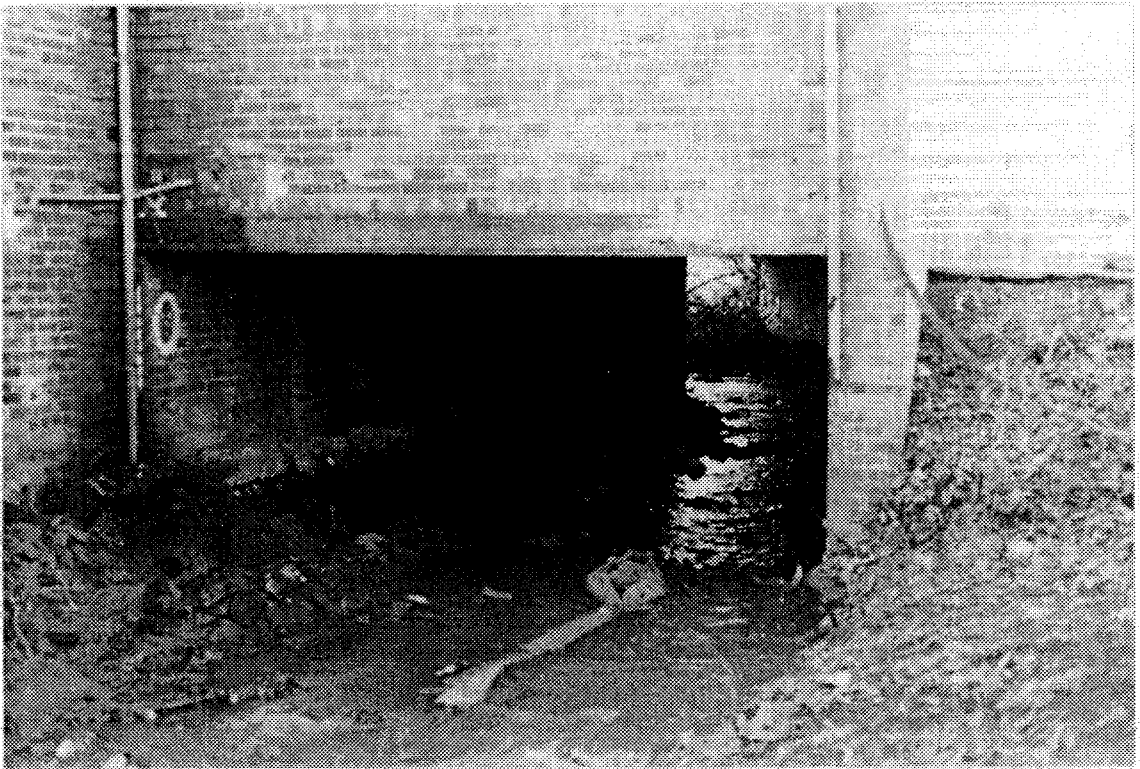
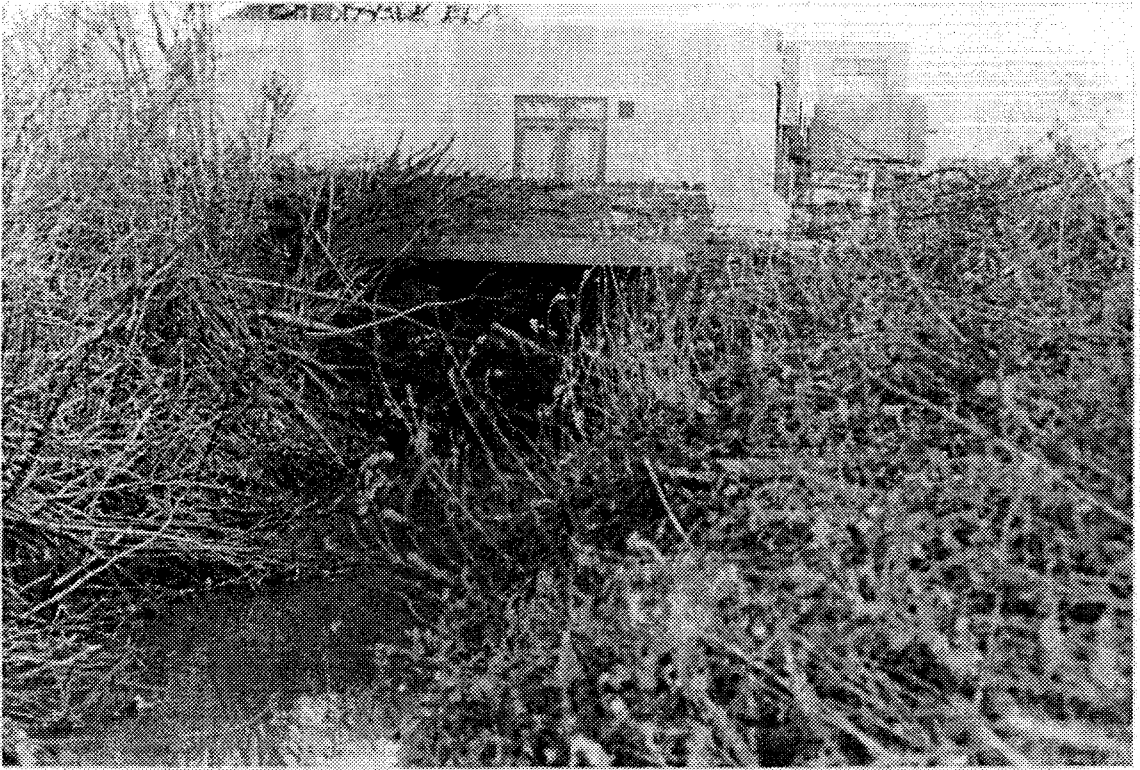


PLATE 11      CULVERT No.11    (Inlet above - Outlet below)

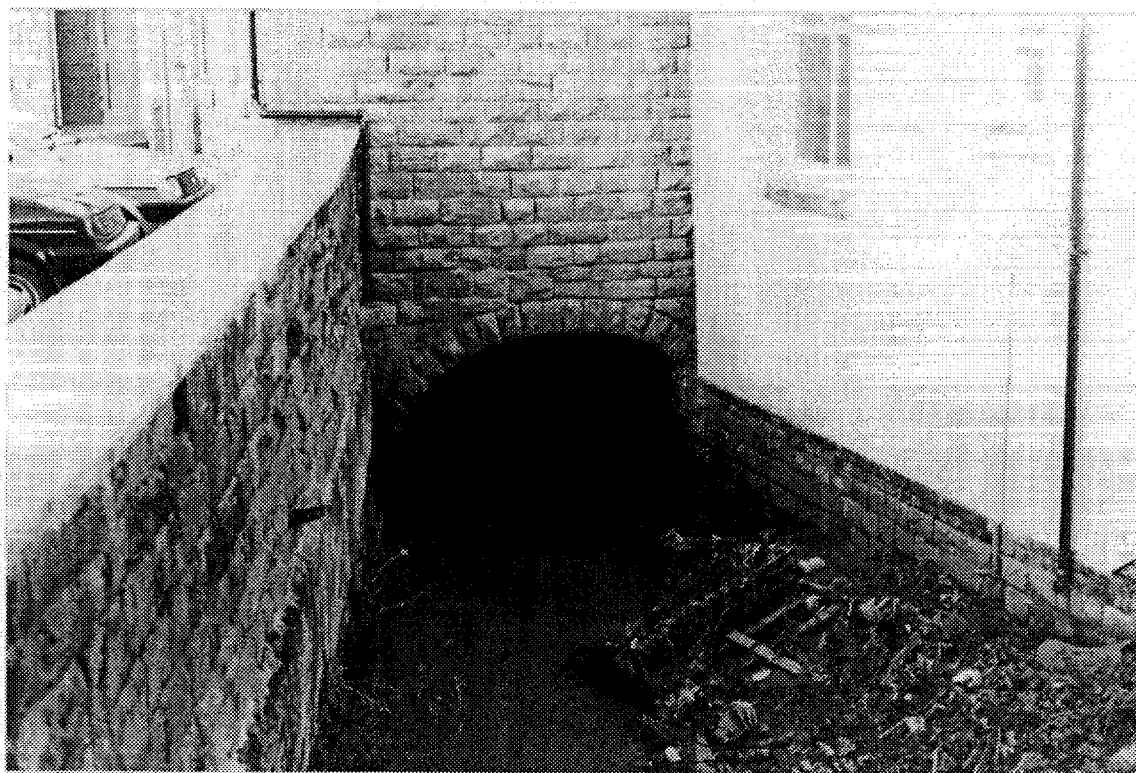
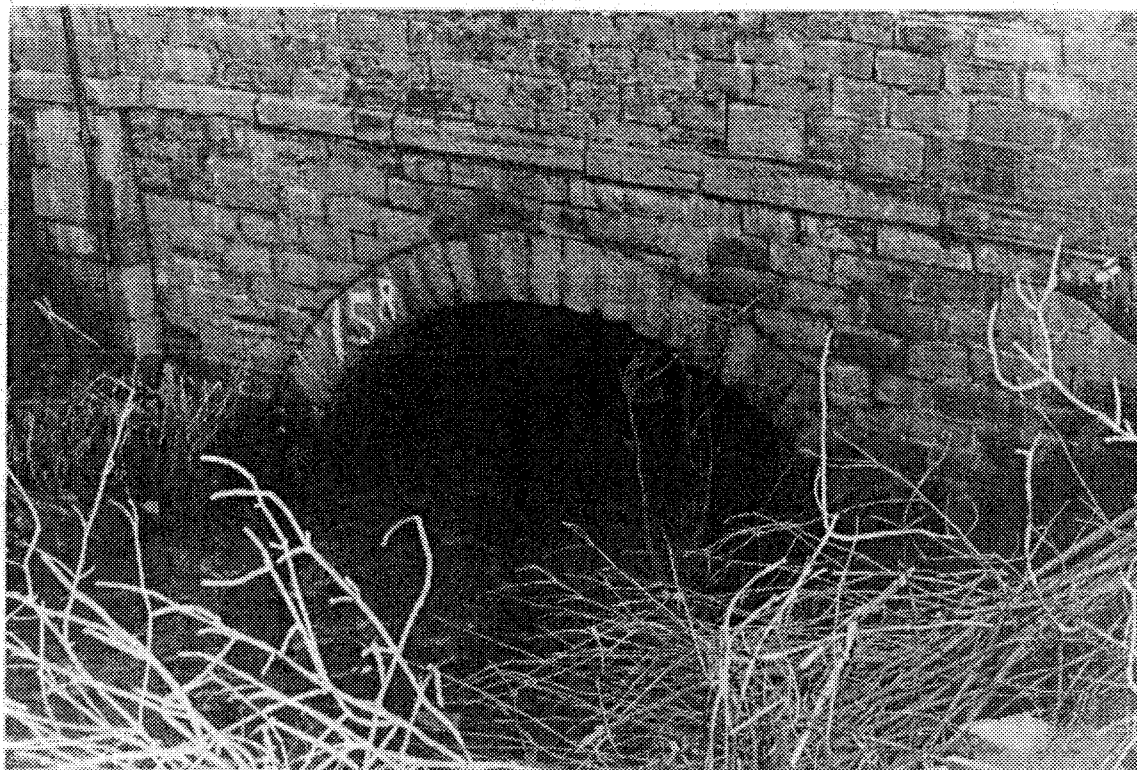


PLATE 12      CULVERT No.12 (Inlet above - Outlet below)

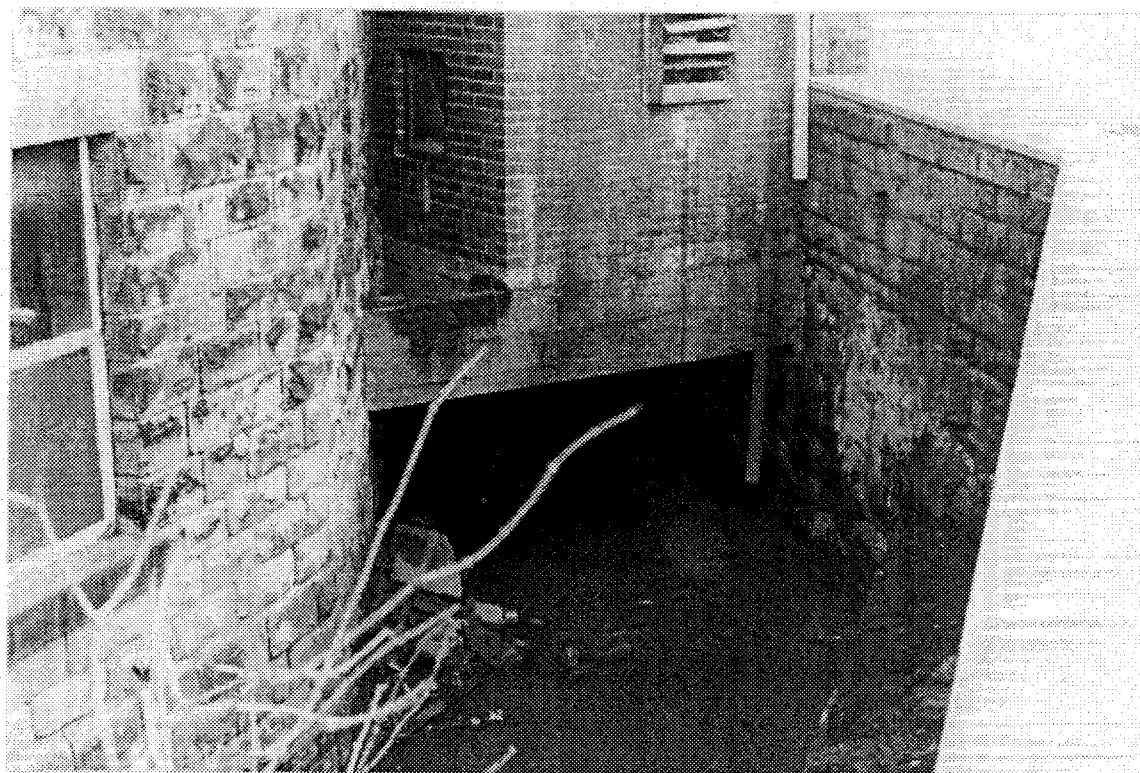


PLATE 13

CULVERT No.13 (Inlet above - Outlet below)



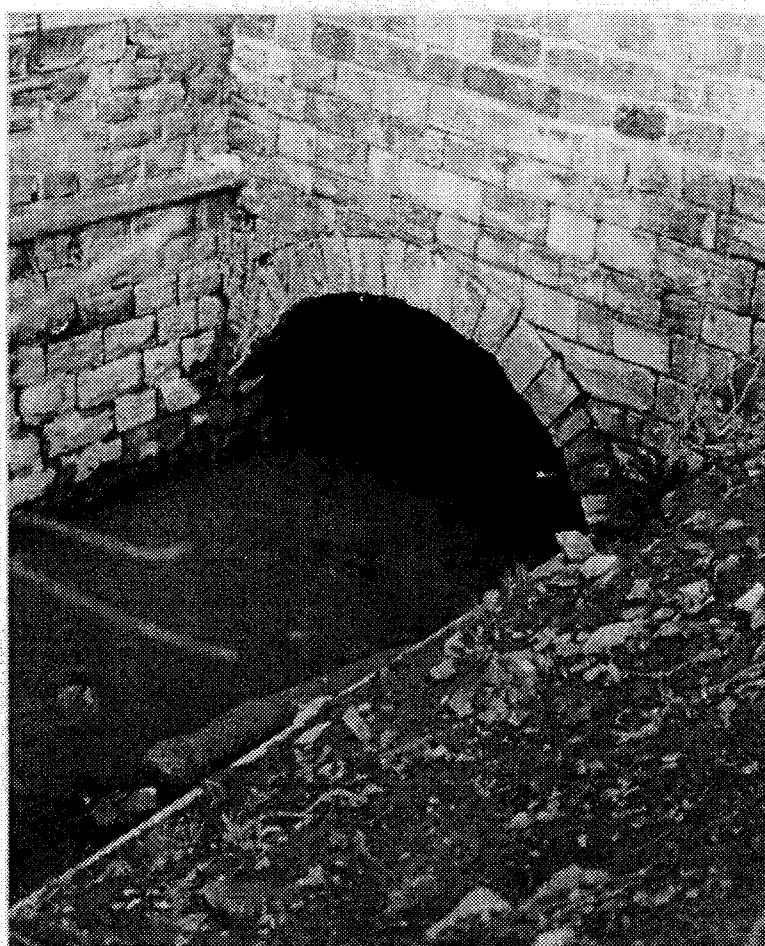
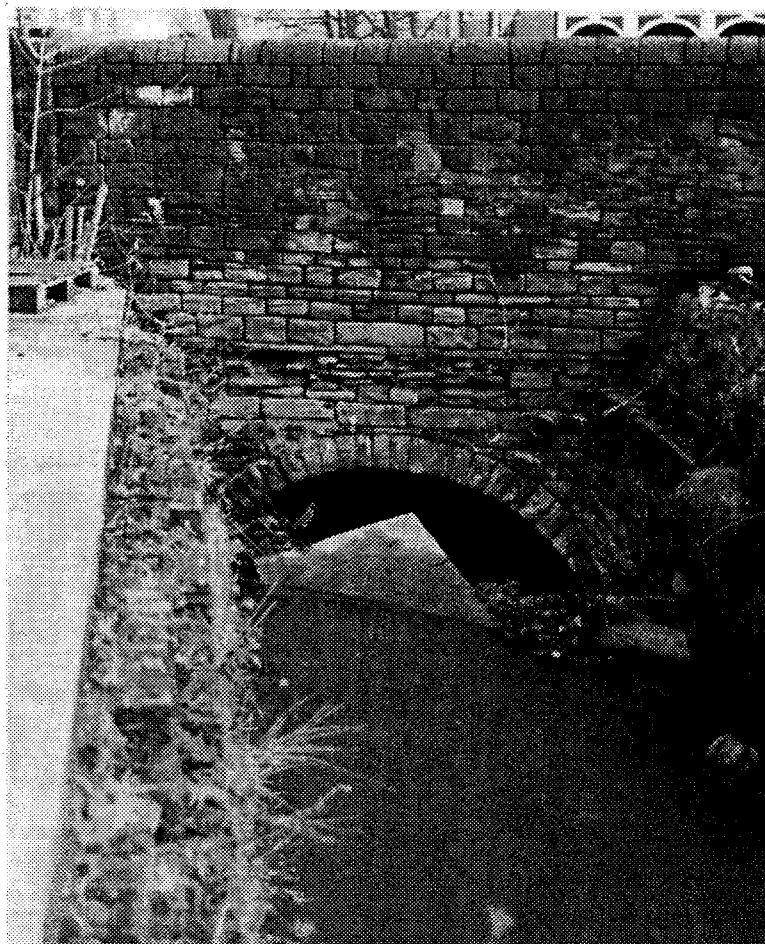


PLATE 14 CULVERT No.14 (Inlet above - Outlet below)

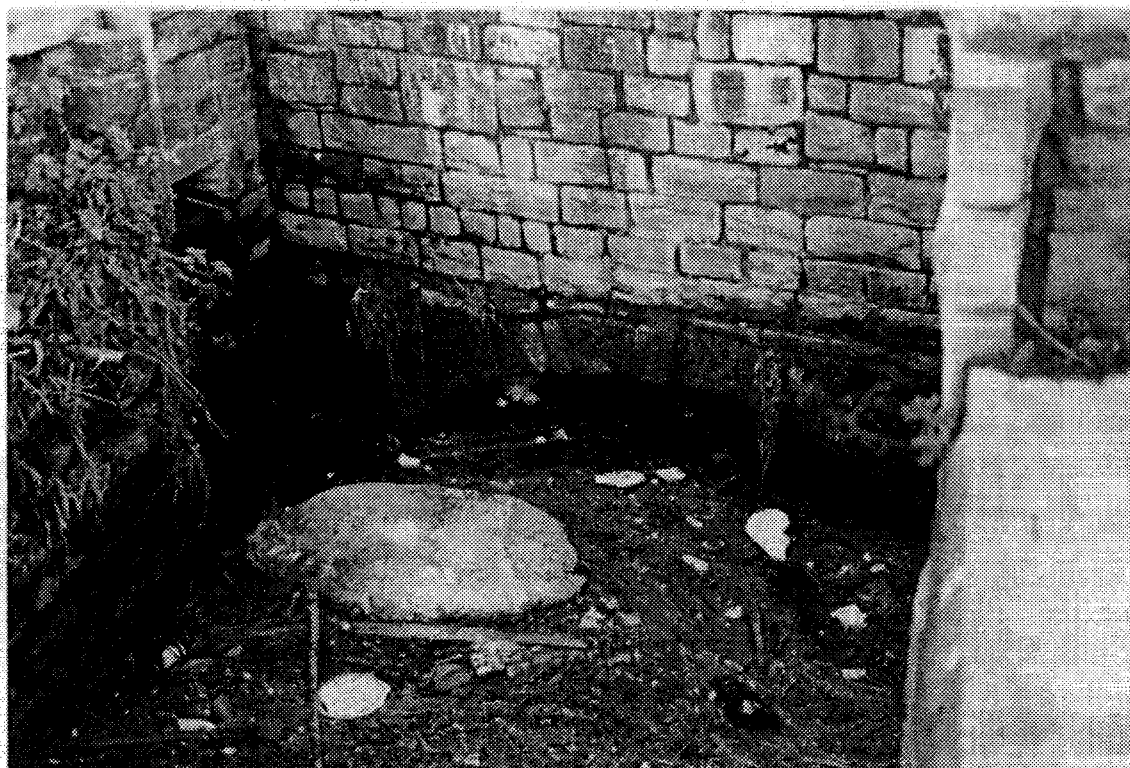
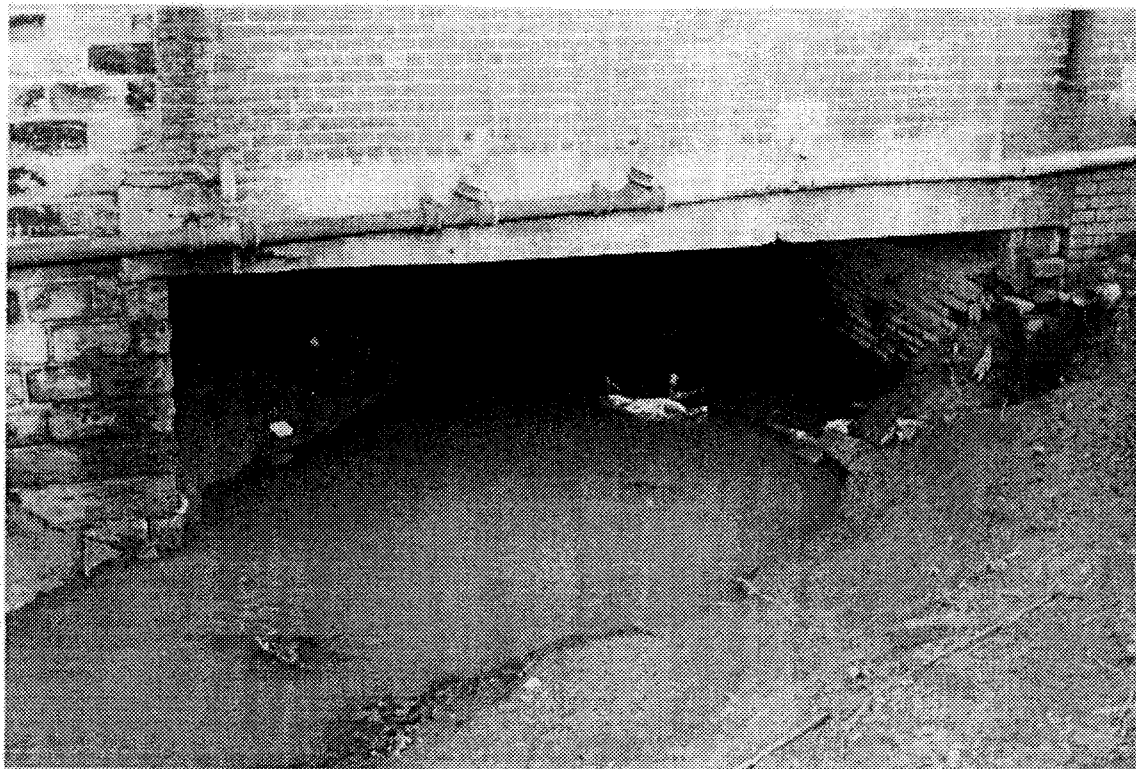
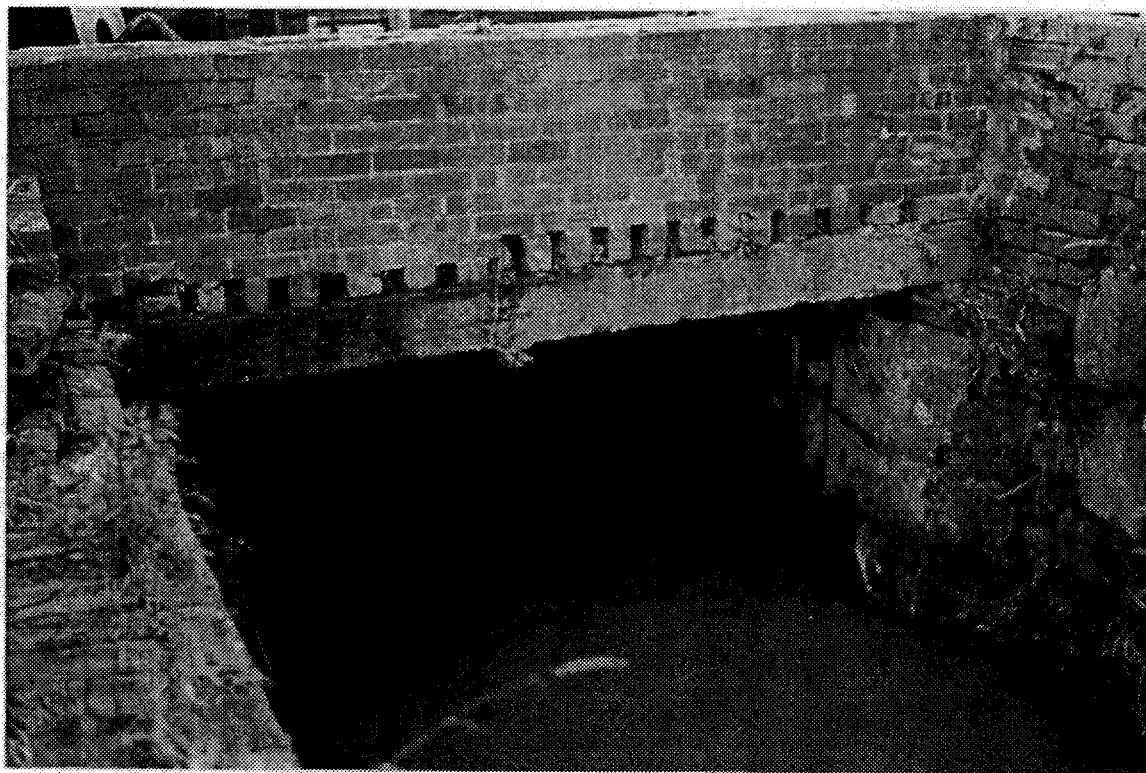
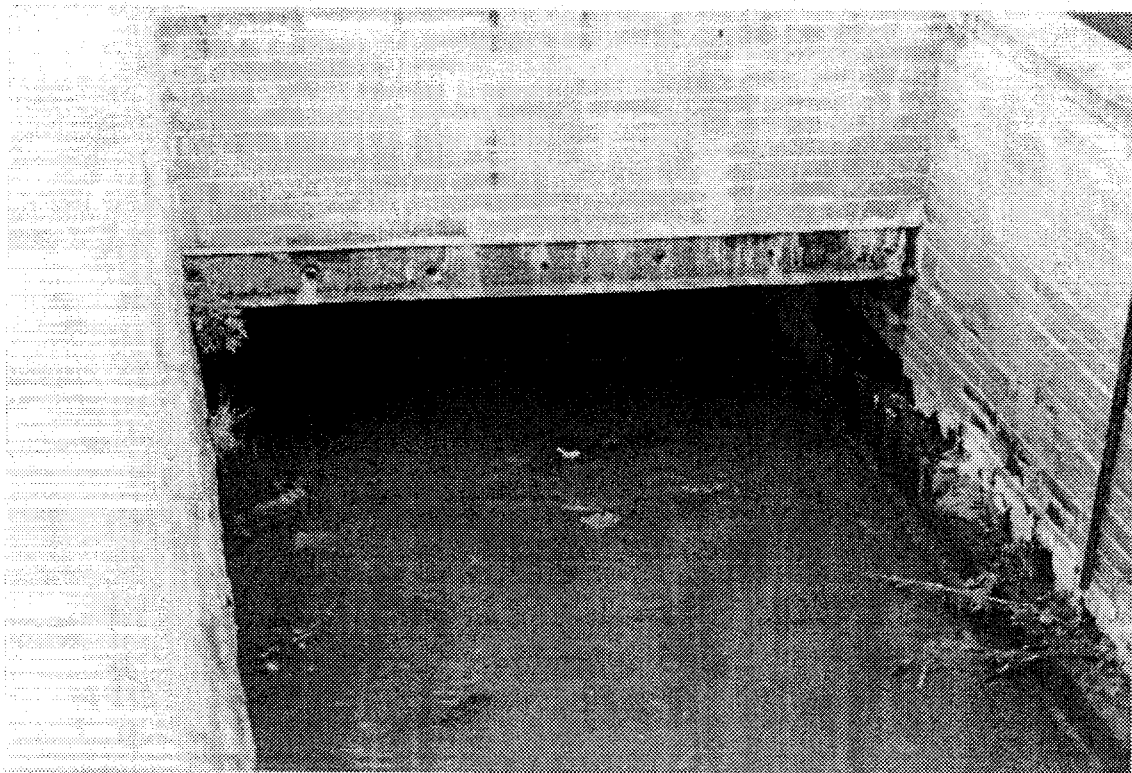


PLATE 15      CULVERT No.15    (Inlet above - Outlet below)





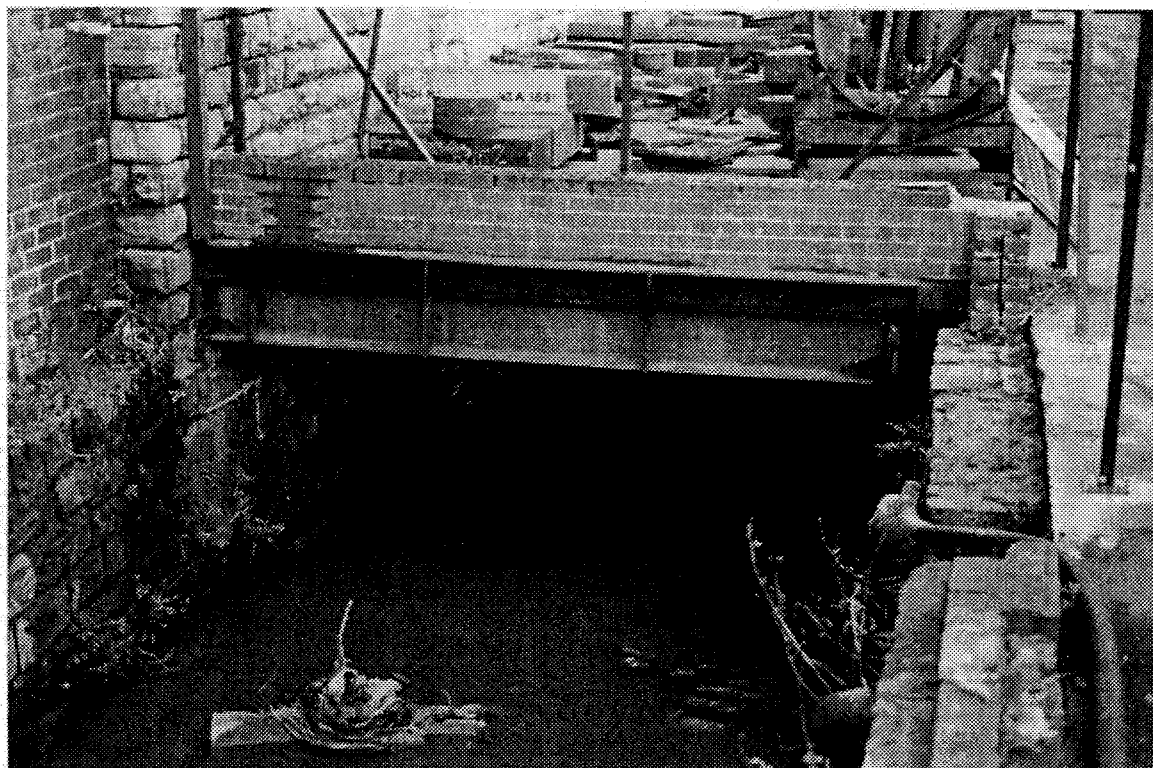


PLATE 17      CULVERT No.17 (Inlet above - Outlet below)

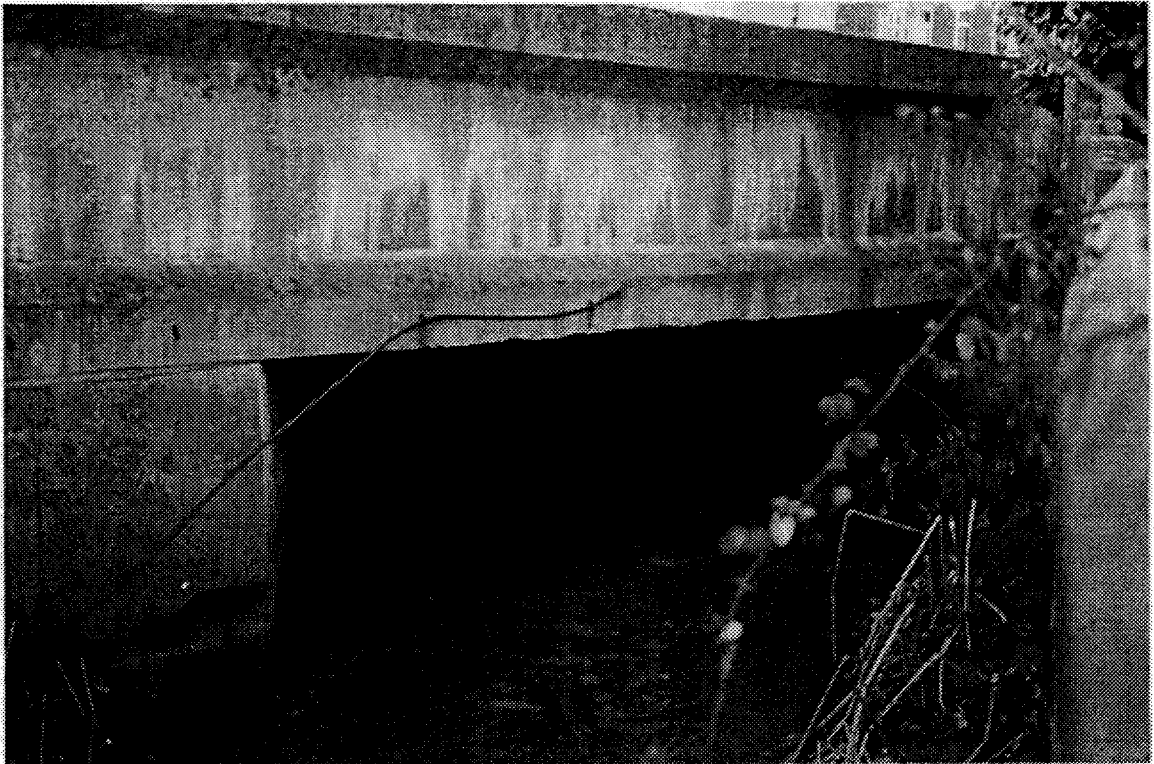
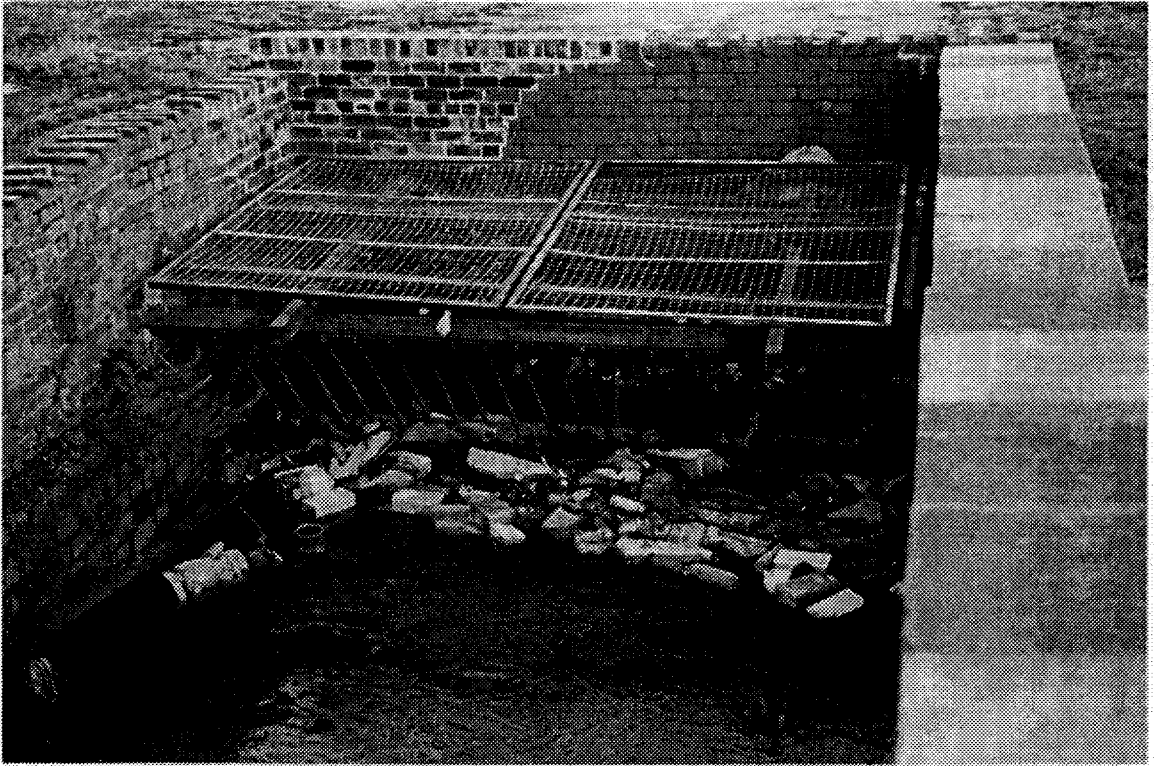


PLATE 18 CULVERT No.18 (Inlet above - Outlet below)



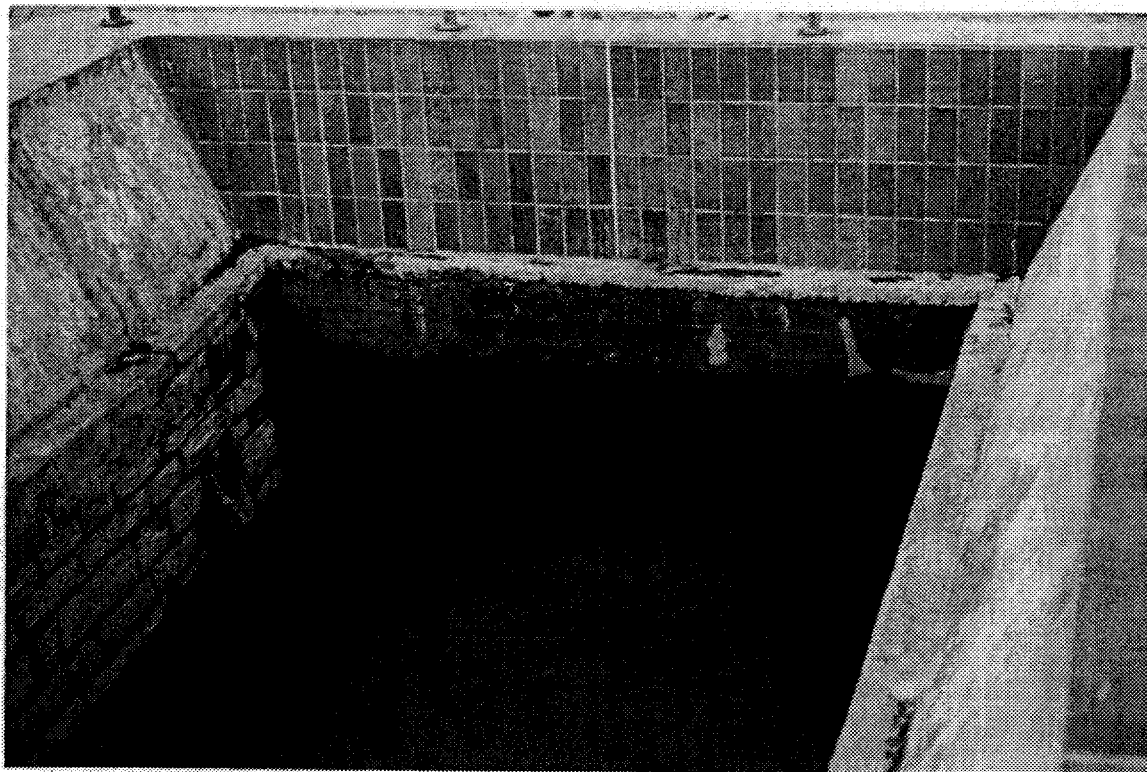
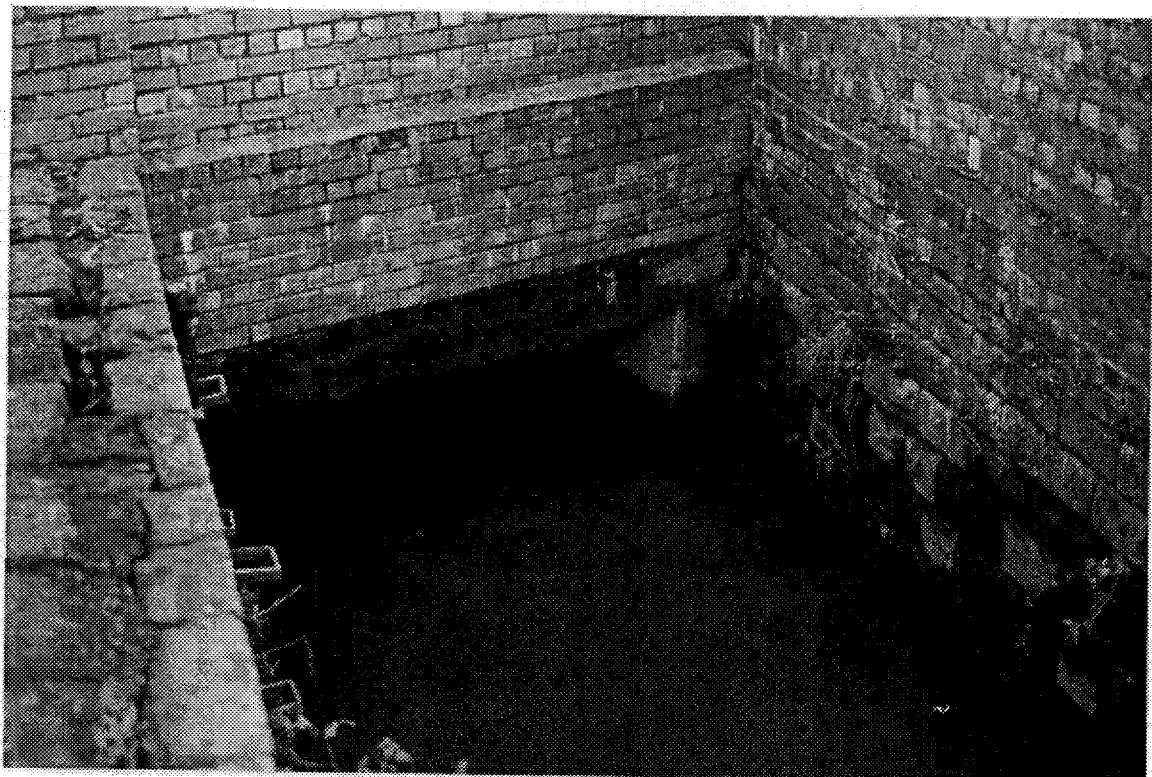


PLATE 19A      CULVERT No.19A (Inlet above - Outlet below)



PLATE 19B CULVERT No.19B (Inlet above - Outlet below)

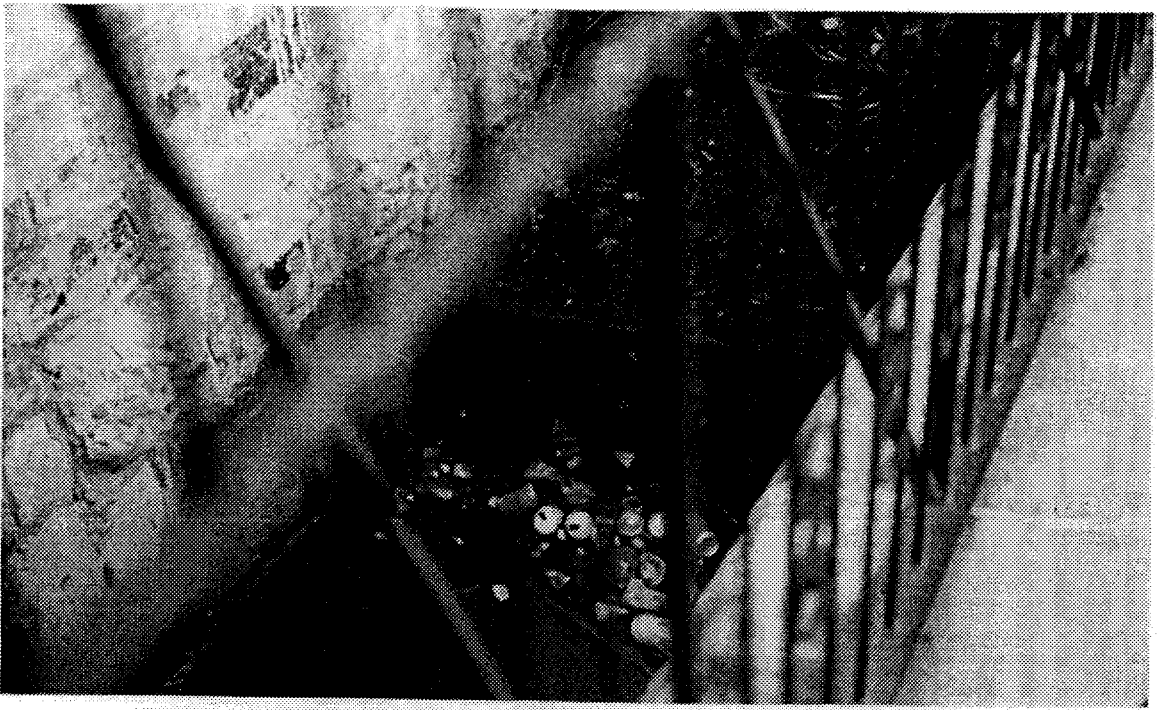


PLATE 20 CULVERT No.20 (Inlet above - Outlet below)



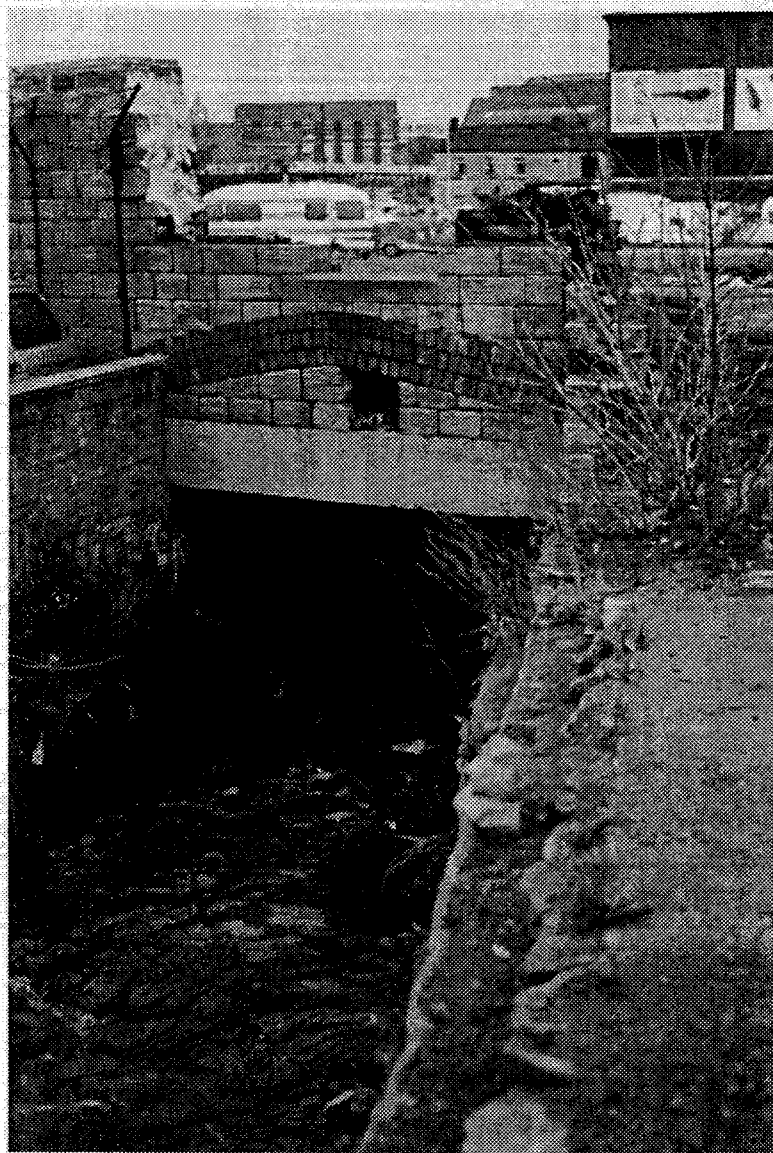


PLATE 21      CULVERT No.21    (Inlet above - Outlet below)

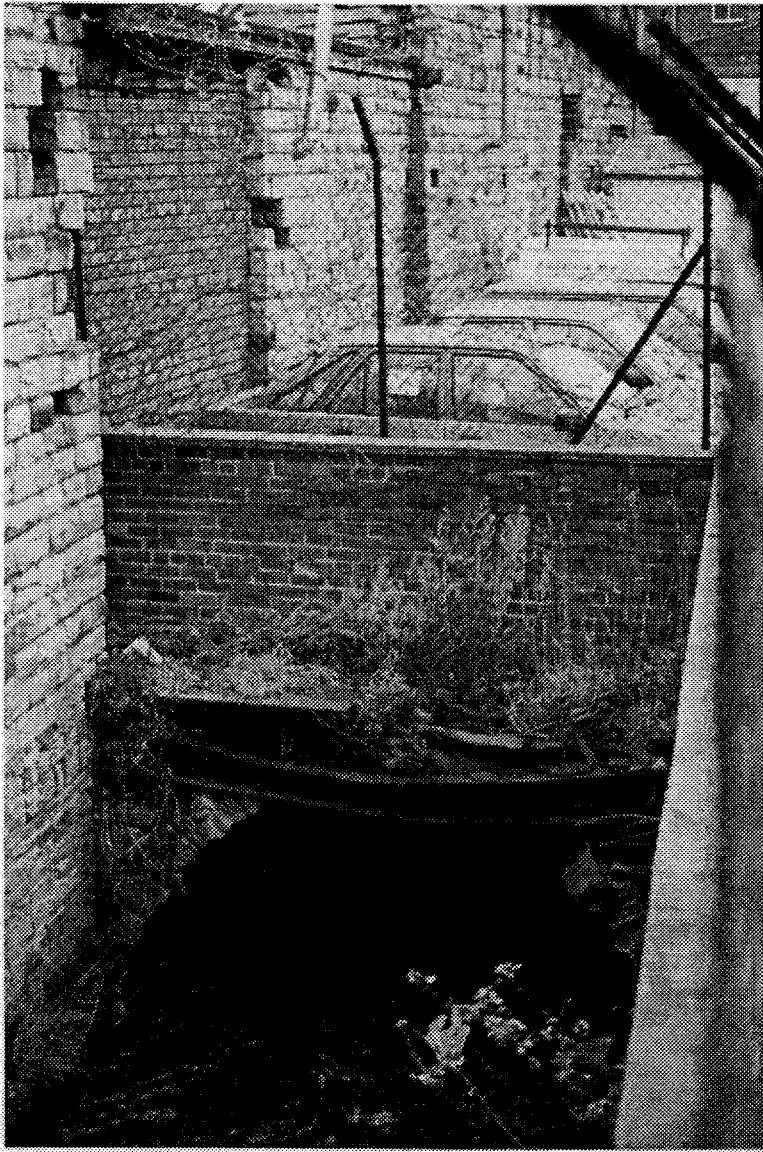


PLATE 22 CULVERT No.22 (Inlet above - Outlet below)

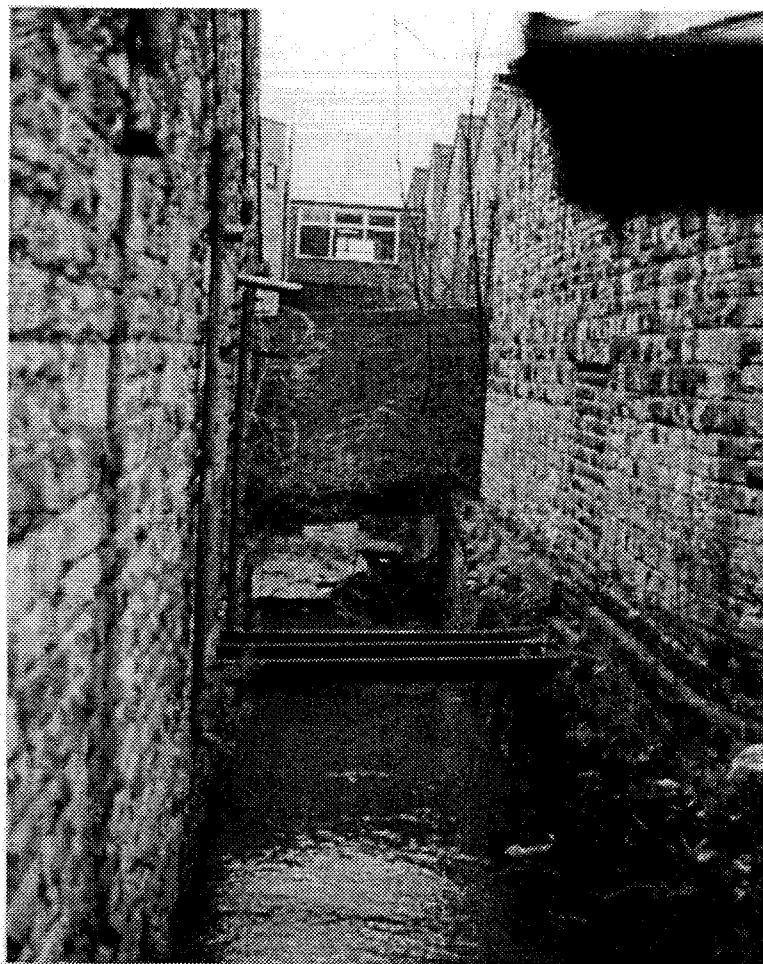
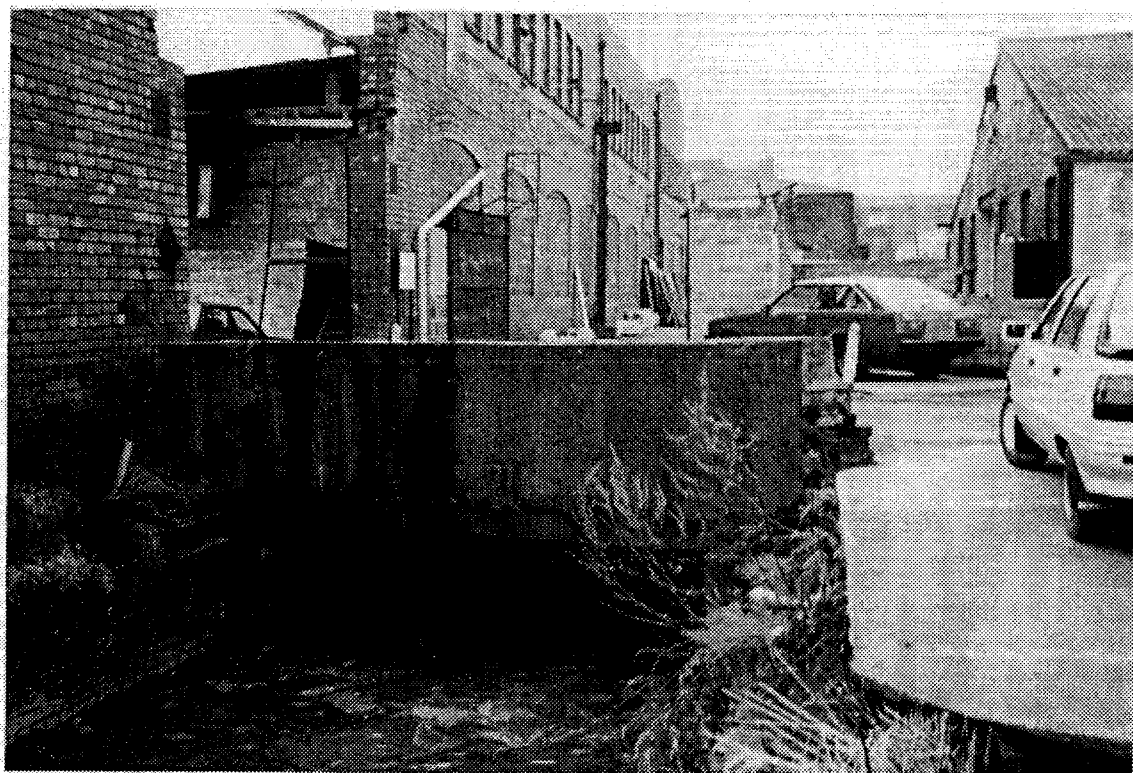


PLATE 23      CULVERT No.23 (above) and CULVERT No.24 (below)





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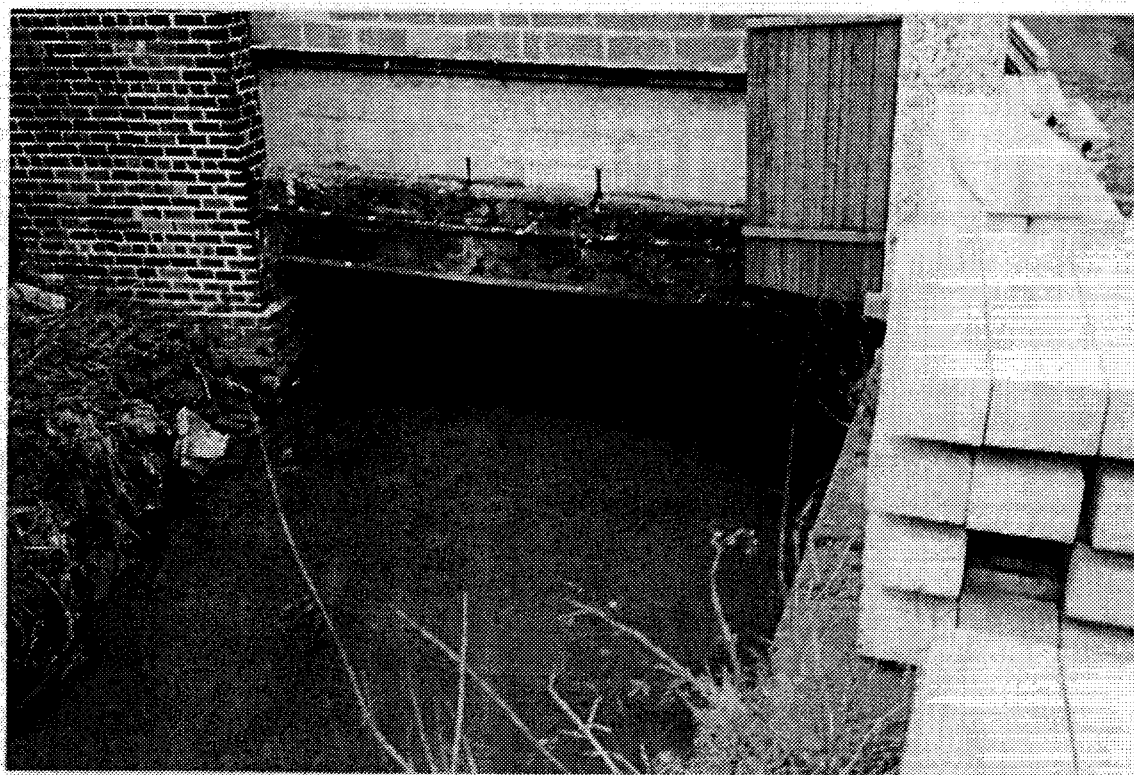


PLATE 24 CULVERT No.25 (Inlet above - Outlet below)

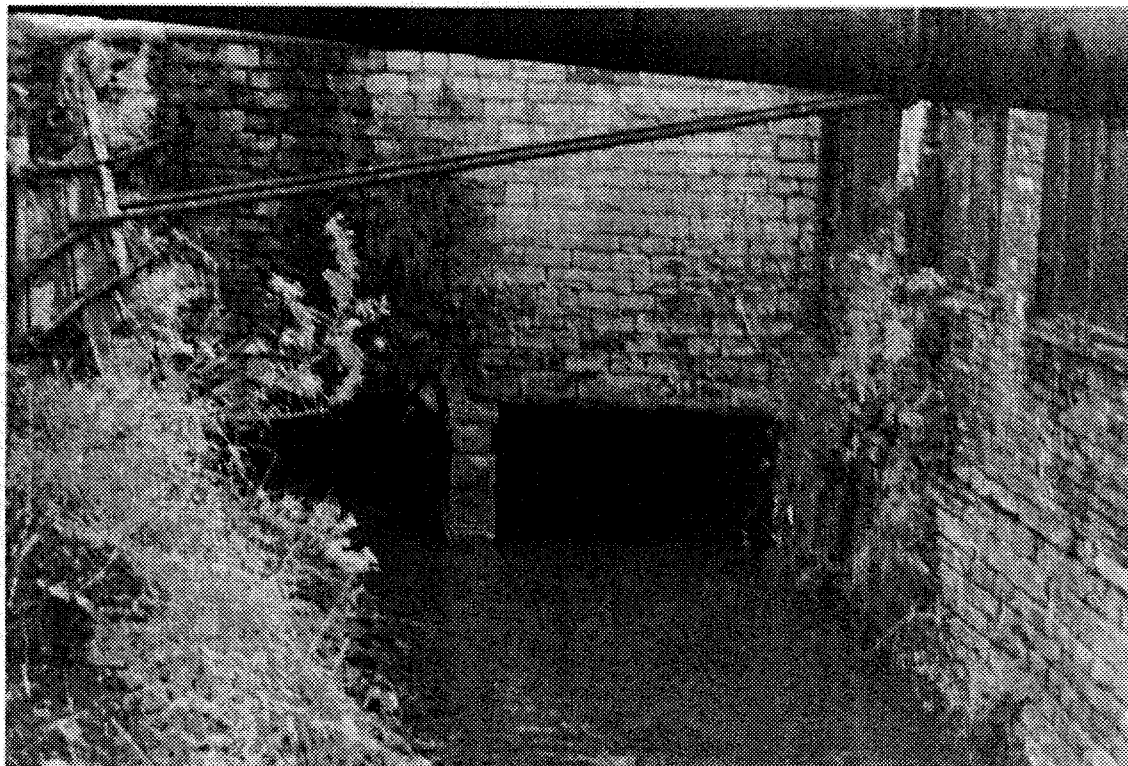
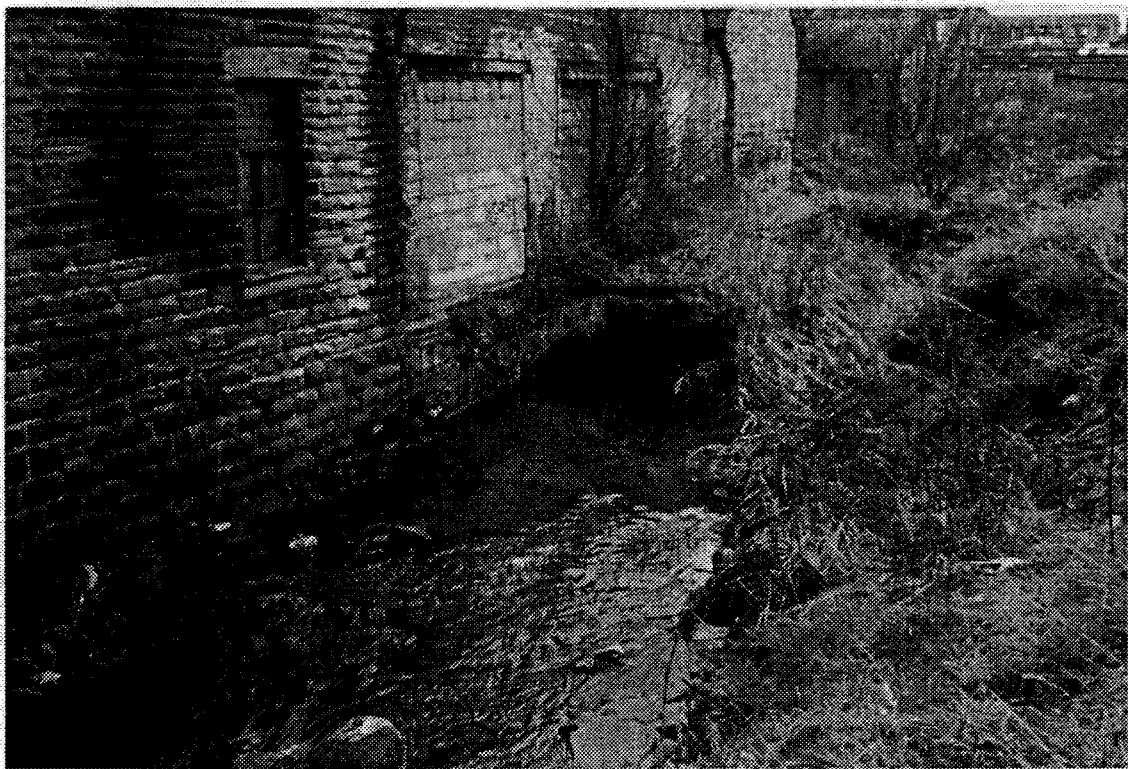


PLATE 25      CULVERT No.26    (Inlet above - Outlet below)





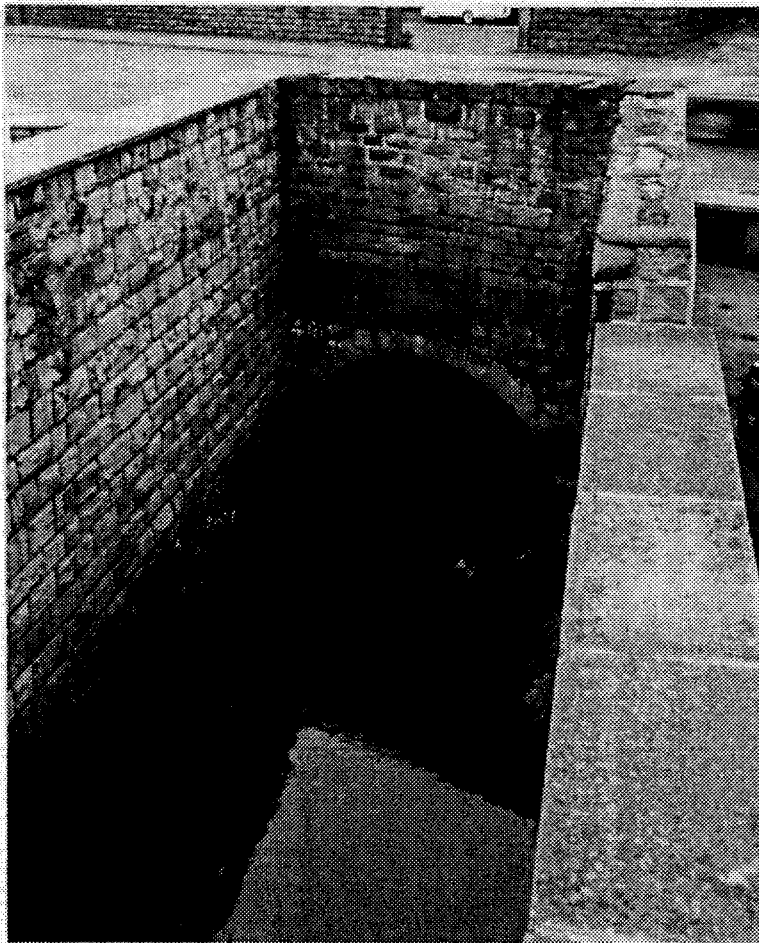
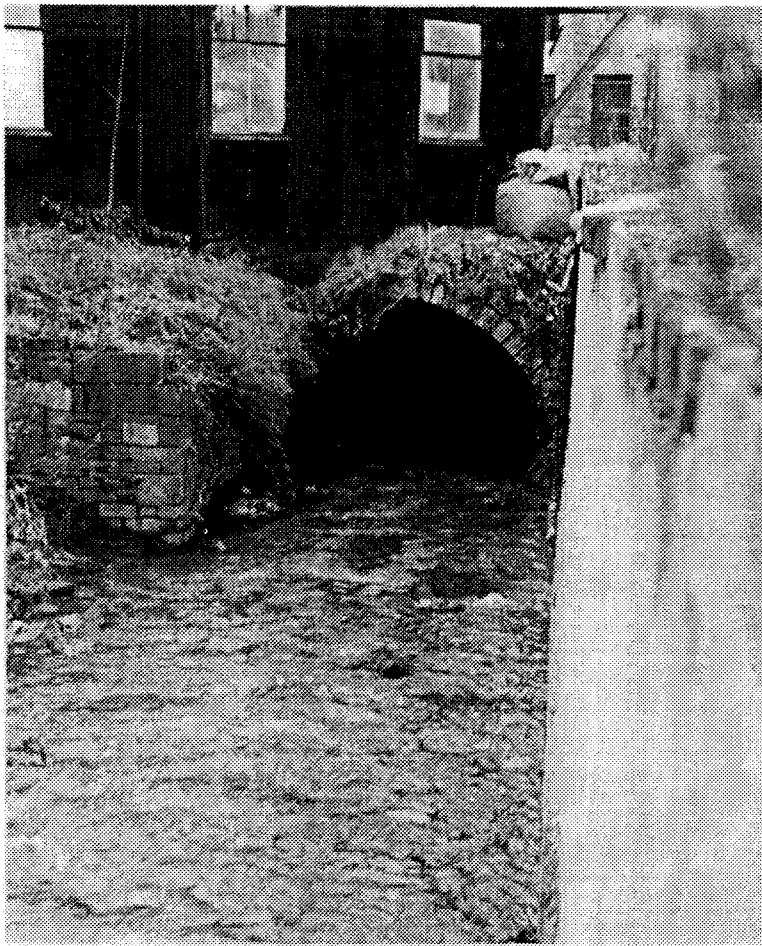


PLATE 27      CULVERT No.28    (Inlet above - Outlet below)

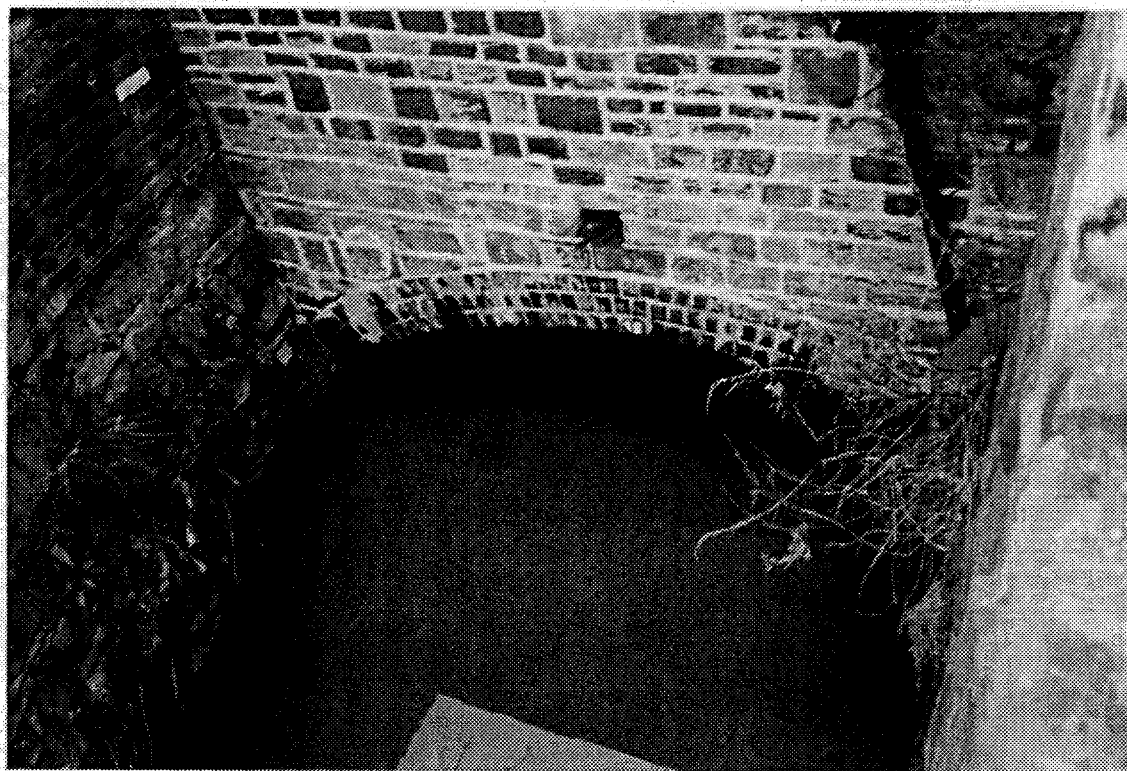
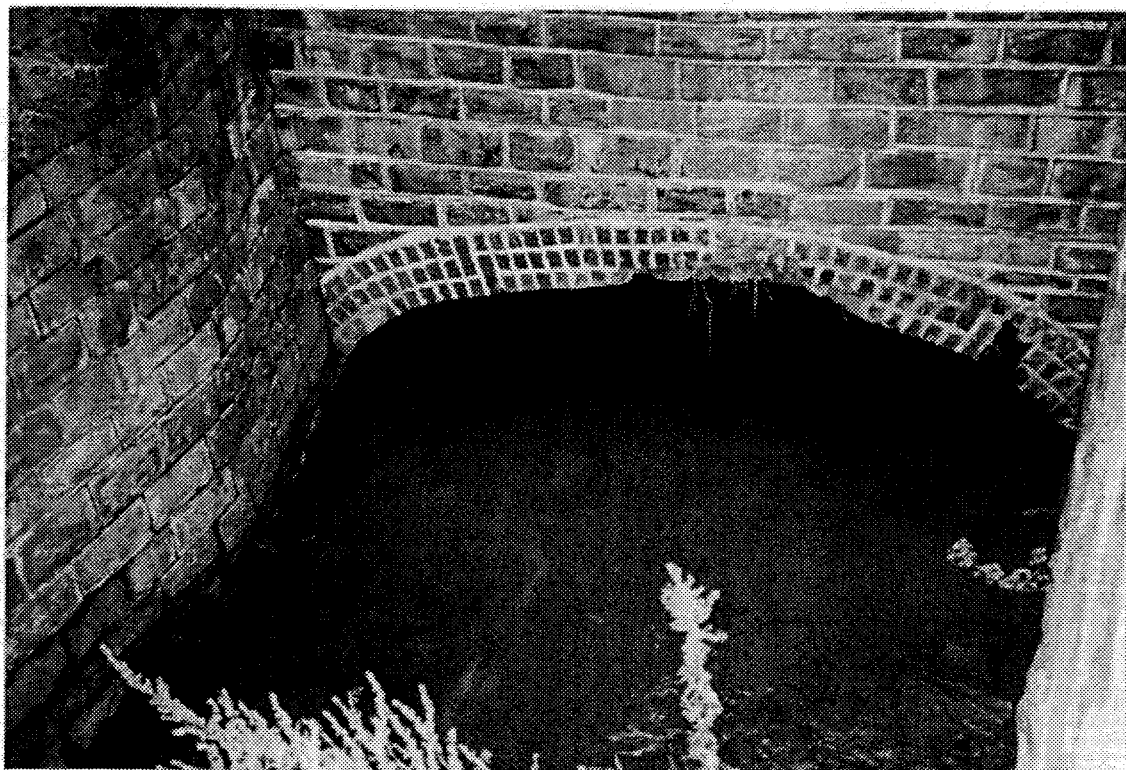


PLATE 28      CULVERT No. 29    (Inlet above - Outlet below)



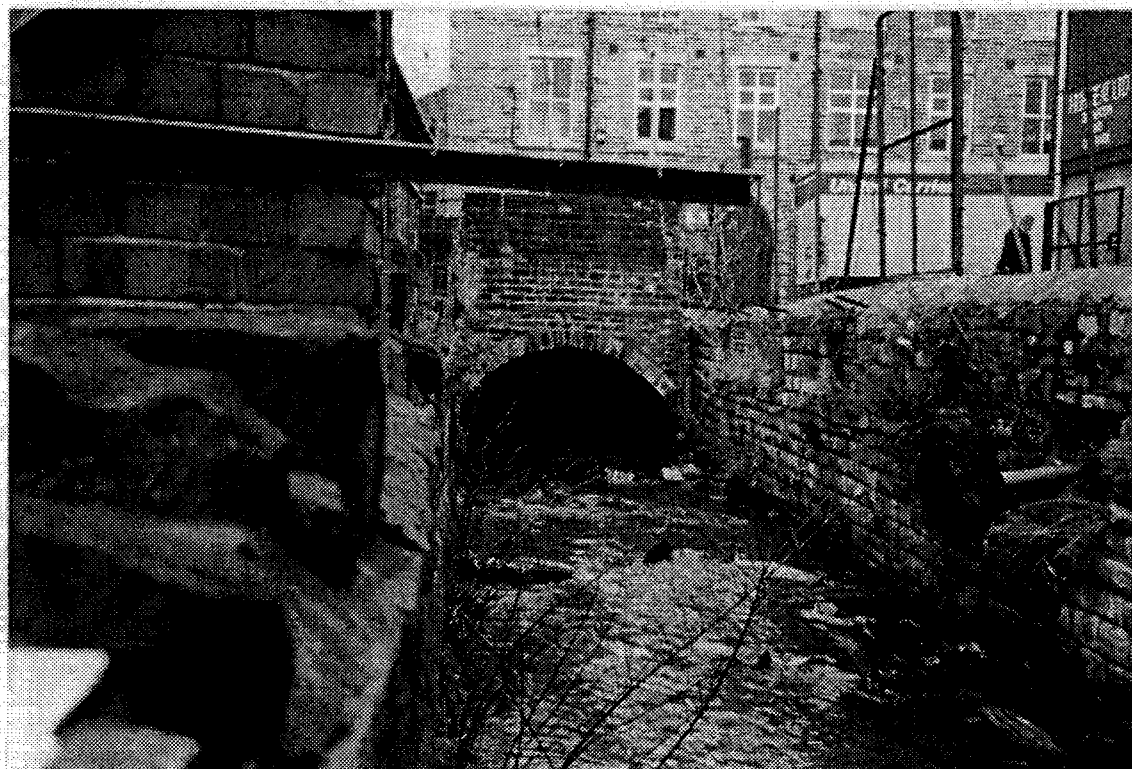
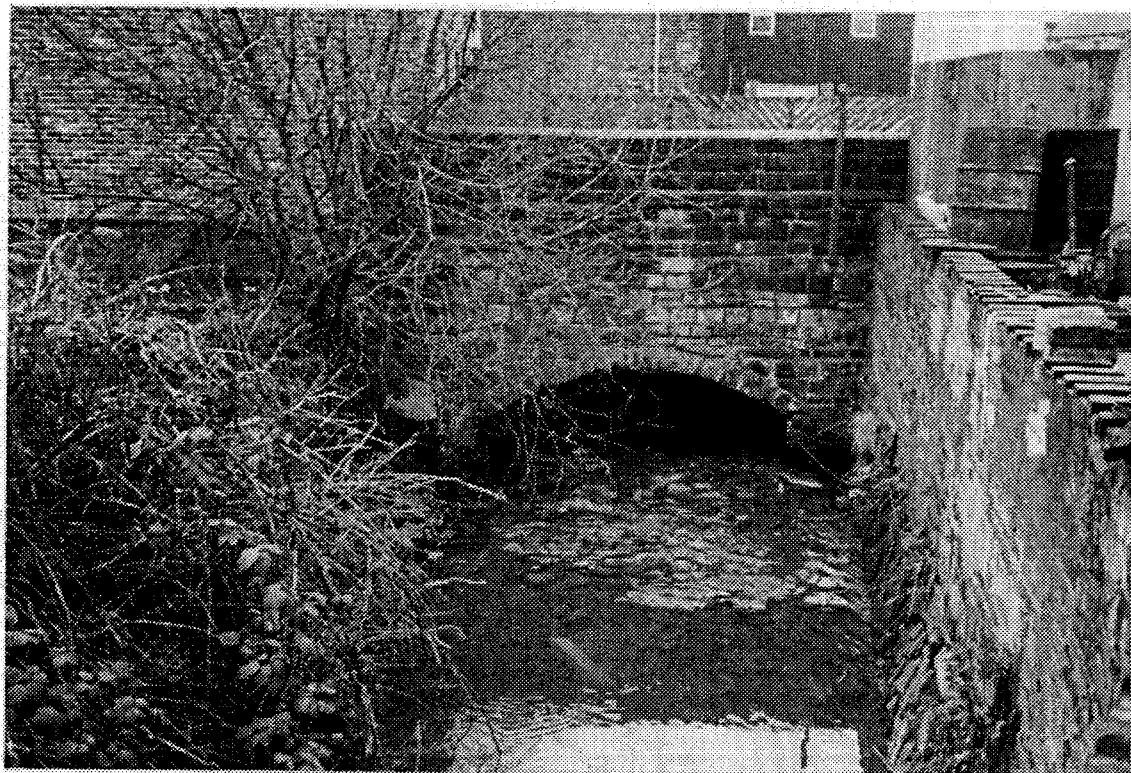


PLATE 29 CULVERT No.30 (Inlet above - Outlet below)

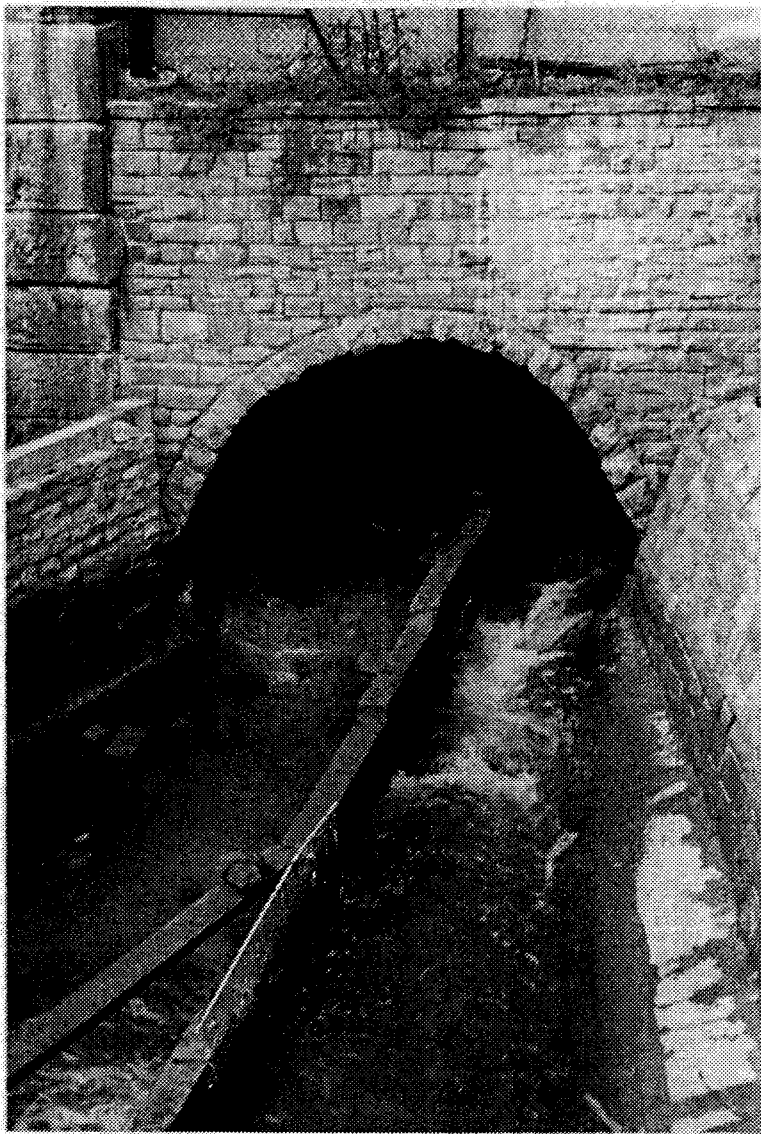


PLATE 30      CULVERT No.31    (Inlet above - Outlet below)

