Notes and Documents.

Hides and Virgates at Battle Abbey.

IN his *English Village Community*¹ Mr. Seebohm quotes from 'the documents of Battle Abbey given by Dugdale' a statement that eight virgates made one hide and four virgates one wista. This he takes to prove the existence in Sussex of the double hide of 240 acres, some traces of which he finds elsewhere.² Of course he proceeds on the assumption that the Sussex virgate contained 30 acres. Professor Maitland disputes both his fact and his inference.³ The citation from Dugdale, he says, 'seems to refer to the statement now printed in the *Battle Cartulary* (Camden Society), p. xiii, where 1 H=4 v.' Here he does injustice to Mr. Seebohm, who is guiltless of a misquotation. The citation was not from the *Custumals* (which Professor Maitland by a slip describes as the cartulary) of Battle Abbey, edited for the Camden Society in 1887 by Mr. Scargill Bird, but from the *Chronicon de Bello*, lengthy excerpts from which were appended by Dugdale to his account of the Abbey in the *Monasticon*. Mr. Seebohm was apparently not aware that the chronicle had been published in full by the Anglia Christiana Society so long ago as 1846.

The writer of this very interesting and valuable account of the foundation and early history of the house built to commemorate the Conqueror's victory undoubtedly makes the statement attributed to him. *Octo itaque virgatae*, he says, *unam hidam faciunt. Wista vero quatuor virgatis constat*.⁴ He says so, but can we believe him? If he is right, current notions on the early land measures of our country will need revision. Evidence has already been adduced which seems to show that the hide of Domesday contained four times as many acres in one district as it did in another.⁵ Is it possible that twice as many virgates went to the hide in Sussex as elsewhere? Or must Mr. Seebohm's alternative of the double hide be accepted? The content assigned to the

¹ P. 51.

² *Ibid.* pp. 37, 39, 54.

³ *Domesday Book and Beyond*, p. 394 n.

⁴ *Monasticon* (ed. 1846), iii. 241; *Chron. de Bello*, p. 11.

⁵ *English Historical Review*, xvii. 280.

wista by the chronicler might be held to support the latter view. Normally the *wista* was the equivalent on the Battle Abbey manors in Sussex of the virgate of other districts, but in at least one of these manors the fourteenth-century customals show us *magnae wistae* which were taken as equal to half-hides where the hide contained 4 virgates.⁶ If the area of the virgate be assumed as constant, a *wista* of 4 virgates would involve a double hide. But another assumption is possible. Supposing the chronicler's hide to be a single one, and its 8 virgates only half the normal size, a *magna wista* of 2 virgates, each of normal area, would be exactly equivalent to his *wista* of 4 virgates.⁷

Had the author of this equation $1H=8V$ been speaking of the state of things in his own day, he would not have caused us so much concern. For hides in time became very irregular. An equation of this sort derived from Domesday Book, as the one before us professes to be, is another matter. If it were established, Professor Maitland would have to reconsider his decision that the virgate, by the nature of the case, was the fourth of the hide and no other fraction.⁸ The chronicler fortunately gives the Domesday figures from which, with two slight modifications, he obtained his equation. He extracts from Domesday Book, which he calls *Liber Regis*, the rating in hides and virgates of the lands which formed the *leuga* of the Abbey.⁹ In two cases he disputes the Domesday figure and supplies a lower one. In the following table the names are given in the Domesday spelling, from which he diverges somewhat, and the chronicler's figures where they differ are inserted in brackets:—

	H.	V.
Bochecham	$\frac{1}{2}$	—
Bece	—	8
Wasingate	—	1 ($\frac{1}{2}$)
Wilminte	—	6 (5)
Nirefeld	—	6
Peneherst	$\frac{1}{2}$	—
Hov	$\frac{1}{4}$	—
Pilescham	—	1
Cedesfeld	—	8
Bollintun	2 minus	1
Croherst	—	1
Witinges	—	1
Holintun	—	1

⁶ *Chron. de Bello*, p. 17; *Customals of Battle Abbey*, pp. xiii, 29.

⁷ The Hundred Rolls furnish a Huntingdonshire instance of a hide divided into 8 virgates of 15 acres (Seeborn, p. 37). But departures from the normal were so common by that date that nothing can be built upon this coincidence.

⁸ *Domesday Book and Beyond*, p. 385.

⁹ *Chron. de Bello*, p. 10; D. B. i. 17, b.

These figures are followed in the chronicle by a statement of the total: *Summa: sex hidae et dimidia virgata*. The writer then remarks, *Octo itaque virgatae unam hidam faciunt*.

Now (1) the details are certainly preceded in Domesday by what looks like a statement of their total, which differs only slightly from the chronicler's: *ipse abbas habet in suo rapo sex hidas et dimidiam*. If 1 H=4 v, the actual total would be 9 hides. (2) As modified in the chronicle the figures work out exactly to its total if eight virgates make a hide. The case might seem proved. But a statement appended to the figures in Domesday and not reproduced by the chronicler may throw another light upon them. It runs thus: *De omni hac terra habet abbas in dominio duas hidas et dimidium*.¹⁰ *Hae hidae non geldaverunt in rapo*. The 6½ hides at which the Abbey lands in the rape were rated could hardly include these 2½ hides, which paid no geld there, but the latter may be included in the figures given for the individual holdings. Assuming a hide of 4 virgates these make a total of 9 hides. Now 2½ hides subtracted from 9 leave exactly 6½. If this explanation be the right one, we must suppose that the chronicler thought that 6½ hides was the actual total of the Domesday details, not merely the total after subtracting the 2½ hides of demesne, and that under this misapprehension he deduced a hide of eight virgates. It should be noticed that though, on this assumption, the details with his modifications work out exactly to his total the sum of the Domesday figures is not the 6½ hides which he took to be their total. If 1 H=8 v, they would make 6¼ hides, not 6½.

Why did he drag in the *wista*? We can only throw out the conjecture that having arrived at the conclusion that the Domesday hide contained twice as many virgates as the hide of his own day, half of which was sometimes called a *magna wista*, he thought it necessary to postulate the existence of an earlier *wista* of 4 virgates instead of 2.

A search through the Sussex Domesday for some definite light on the relation of virgate to hide on the whole strengthens our belief that the Battle writer misinterpreted his text. An entry under Brislinga¹¹ at the first glance gives us pause. Brislinga, we are informed, is rated at 1 hide, and 'of this hide Robert holds 4 virgates of the Count (of Eu).' Surely this must imply a hide of more than 4 virgates? But another case of an estate rated at 1 hide 'of which' five tenants held 13 virgates in all points to the true explanation.¹² These are instances where 'beneficial hidation' has been at work. The manor has originally been rated at more than a hide, and the holdings are expressed as fractions of the old,

¹⁰ The editor of the *Chron. de Bello* carelessly took this to be intended as the total, and suggested a typographical error.

¹¹ D. B. i. 18, b.

¹² *Ibid.* i. 20, a.

not the new rating. In the light of this we shall not attach too much importance to an entry in which the details exactly equal the rating if $8 \text{ v} = 1 \text{ h}$. Francwelle is rated at $1\frac{1}{2}$ hides and is held of the Count of Eu by 6 knights, whose shares are as follows:—

	H.	V.
Normanus	$\frac{1}{2}$	—
Radulfus	—	2
Hugo	—	2
Osbernus	—	2
Wenenc	—	1
Girardus	—	1

It is probably a $2\frac{1}{2}$ -hide manor which has had a hide knocked off its rating. In all these cases the 'beneficial hidation' seems to have been effected before the last year of the Confessor, and so the original figure is not stated. But where the reduction has been made T.R.W. and both ratings are supplied the details are always fractions of the earlier one. The case of Horintune is chosen to illustrate this, because it also offers one of three clear proofs that the hide in Sussex, as elsewhere, contained 4 virgates and not 8.

Horintune had been rated at $4\frac{1}{2}$ hides, T.R.E. This has since been reduced to 3 hides 2 virgates.¹³ The holdings were:

	H.	V.
Comes de Owe	$1\frac{1}{2}$	2
Reimbertus	$\frac{1}{2}$	—
Willelmus	1	—
Hugo	$\frac{1}{2}$	—
Ulwardus	—	2
	$4\frac{1}{2}$	

A similar case is that of Duntune, a five-hide manor, T.R.E., but in 1086 rated at one hide only.¹⁴ Here the details are:

	H.	V.
Willelmus	2	1
Robertus	1	1
Alter miles	$1\frac{1}{2}$	—
	5	

A third proof of the equation $1 \text{ h} = 4 \text{ v}$ is even more satisfactory. Werste under the Confessor paid geld on 6 hides. In 1086 it was only rated at 4 hides, 3 virgates, and the difference is accounted for in a note: *quinque virg' sunt retro quia una hida est in rapo Com' de Moriton*.¹⁵ This seems to give us the conclusive equation $4 \text{ h} + 3 \text{ v} + 5 \text{ v} = 6 \text{ h}$.

JAMES TAIT.

¹³ D. B. i. 18, b.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* i. 29, a.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* i. 20, a.