

# BUSINESS ARCHIVES IN SWEDEN

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## **Introduction**

From an historical perspective records have been kept for at least as long as businesses needing written transactions have existed. Records and archives management is instrumental for an organisation to function. It is also the means of safeguarding the organisation's economic and legal interests. Paradoxically, archives management in the business sector has been limited and few companies employ professional archivists. This is partly due to terminology; great resources are spent on information processing within companies and the development of information technology which the recent years' demand for quality certification such as ISO 9000, have made necessary. Few link information management with records and archives management. Most of the time it is the technical aspects that receive most interest and these are primarily dealt with by staff other than archivists; administrators, system analysts, engineers, librarians etc. One reason for this is that awareness of records and archives management and of the professional abilities of archivists are not widespread in society, and particularly not in the business sector. This is the result, sadly, of a failure of the profession to raise its profile and educate the public, but hopefully a change is imminent.

## **The Swedish archives**

In order to be able to describe Swedish business archives, it is necessary to give a summary of the Swedish archival system. Firstly, it is important to keep in mind that in principle there has never been a difference between records management and archives management in Sweden. There is no difference between an archivist and a records manager in Sweden; a Swedish archivist is expected to play both roles. One might say that the Swedish archival system relies on the continuum perspective. This is the situation in the Swedish public administration system, and has spread to other sectors in society.

The development of the archival system in Sweden has been towards a relatively clear distribution of tasks and responsibilities between governmental, municipal and private archival activities, even if they sometimes overlap. This is due partly to the Swedish administrative system, and partly to historical factors that have influenced the development of archives in the private sector.

Governmental archival functions could be said to consist of the management of records and archives within all governmental agencies together with the National Archives, the Royal Military Archives and the provincial archives. The governmental agencies have a statutory responsibility for their own records and archives management. The archival institutions supervise the

governmental agencies to see that they meet the demands of the law, and collect those archives that should be kept but are no longer necessary for the agencies' work. The governmental archival institutions have no right, however, to supervise or issue directives to the municipal agencies or the private sector. They can, on a voluntarily basis, collect archives from the latter two to be kept for research purposes.

The National Archives, however, plays a leading role in the Swedish archival system as it is required to supervise the general development of records and archives management. It also functions as a reference point for various questions concerning archives and distributes state subsidies to private archival institutions.

A great part of the public sector in Sweden is run by municipal agencies. There are two kinds of municipalities in Sweden, local and regional, and each municipality is responsible for its own records and archives management according to the law. Sometimes they collect private archives, but that is voluntary and not part of their legal requirements.

The private sector consists of all records and archives management outside the governmental and municipal sectors: manuscript collections, archival functions within companies and organisations, and the private archival institutions. The Archives Act does not cover archives in private hands, and there are no statutes to regulate records and archives management in the private sector. The management of manuscripts in private collections is unregulated, and will be left out of this discussion. Residues from private manuscript collections can be found in almost every archival institution as well as in libraries, museums and other cultural institutions.

The archives of the popular movements need to be considered as these movements have had a great impact on Swedish society since the late 19th century. They are still relevant today because political influence is mostly channelled through them rather than by the direct influencing of individual politicians. The popular movements of the 19th century, among which the labour movement, the temperance movement, and the revival movement were the most prominent, played an important part in the process of democratisation. These movements had political influence and trained their members in active citizenship. A by-product of this was the formalisation of the clubs' activities – statutes were passed, minutes and lists of members written, and books were kept. The result was a vast creation of records and a thorough documentation of activities.

The initiative to establish archival institutions to collect material from the popular movements seems to have come from the popular movements themselves, perhaps primarily from the labour organisations. Within the labour movement an awareness of the importance of records for documenting history was developed at an early stage. As early as 1902 the Labour Movement's Archives and Library was founded in Stockholm. From its beginning, its purpose was to collect archives from the entire Swedish labour movement, but this gradually became overwhelming. Instead, the Labour Movement's Archives suggested that local organisations should start

collecting their own archives. Some were founded, but all the popular movements began to co-operate on this issue and the so-called popular movements' archives gradually emerged during the 1940s. These institutions nowadays tend to call themselves associations archives rather than popular movements' archives. Today there are about 20 regional institutions with more at a more local level. The popular movements' archives, or the associations archives, thus play an important part in the Swedish archival system at large.

Unfortunately the business sector has not developed in a similar way. Compared to the popular movements' archives the institutions assigned to handle archives from trade and industry are a relatively new phenomenon and so far very limited. Hardly ten business archives have been established in the country since 1970 when Varmlandsarkiv was founded as the first of its kind.

Most business archives today relate to the past hundred years and are primarily archives from mining companies, iron mills, forest companies and saw mills and some of the bigger banks. Larger companies' records are preserved to a greater extent than small companies' records, which were usually scattered after the business closed down. The coverage is thus far from being representative.

### **Business Archives**

Nevertheless, interest in keeping and using business archives for research purposes has existed for some time. During the 1920s and 1930s lists were made of Swedish business records, mainly from iron mills, initiated by the industrialist Carl Sahlin and professor Eli F. Heckscher. This did not result in any measures to encourage the building of special archival repositories for business archives. If business archives were deposited elsewhere than with the archival creators themselves, they were usually kept by the National Archives and the provincial archives, in particular the provincial archives in Gothenburg collected an important number of business archives under the supervision of provincial archivist Gustaf Clemensson.

During the 1970s there was an appreciation of a need for a more proactive approach to the preservation of business archives. Thanks to director-general of the National Archives, Ake Kromnow's personal interest in the matter, the National Archives in the beginning of the 1970s initiated a survey of archives within businesses threatened with closure. A few years later the National Archives was asked by the Swedish association of employers (SAF), amongst others, to investigate the issue of repositories where business archives could be kept on a permanent basis for future research. The investigation resulted in two proposals for the long-term preservation of business archives: the first proposal suggested the creation of a central repository for business archives similar to the so-called Ehrvervsarkivet in Denmark. The other proposal suggested the continued development of regional institutions without central co-ordination. The latter proposal was adopted, although it is difficult to say if this was the result of the investigation or other factors.

All business archives repositories in Sweden have been founded since 1970

when Foreningen Varmlandsarkiv in Karlstad began its work. This was initiated by the then county governor Rolf Edberg and representatives of the forest companies Uddeholm, Billerud, Lesjöfors and Rottneros, supported by the Karlstad county council, the university in Karlstad and the Varmland county museum. The purpose according to the statute is 'to support historical and economic research through preservation of company archives and other organisations in Varmland county, apart from the popular movements' sector'. Over time the Varmlandsarkiv has moved away from concentrating on business archives. In 1986 the activity was taken over by the county council, and since 1995 Varmlandsarkiv has also functioned as the provincial archives for the county of Varmland. Today the institution functions as a co-ordinator for private, municipal and governmental archives throughout the county. The focus is now on local and regional history rather than on business archives.

In 1974 a sister organisation of Foreningen Varmlandsarkiv was founded in Stockholm, named Foreningen Stockholms Foretagsminnen. The initiative came from Stockholms stadsarkiv, the municipality archives in Stockholm which had no resources to collect business archives. The Stockholm chamber of commerce supported the idea, as did representatives of the business sector and some individual companies. The purpose was 'to preserve documents, photos and items from companies, organisations and private persons connected with the trade of Stockholm county, and ... to make the collections available to depositors, researchers and other interested parties'. (Statues 1974) For a while the institution operated as a commercial company called Foretagsarkiv, but this was not successful. The main purpose of Stockholm's Foretagsminnen has always been collecting and preserving business archives.

In 1976 the governor in Ostergotland, Per Eckerberg, initiated the foundation of Ostergotlands business archives in Vadstena, in collaboration with the chamber of commerce in Ostergotland and Sodermanland counties and the provincial archives in Vadstena. The activity was run by the provincial archives and concentrated on collecting and listing archives. According to the 1984 accounts, approximately 200 metres of business archives were held there, but the organisation has not been active in recent years.

A year later, in 1977, the municipality of Orebro established a foundation, Stiftelsen Orebro Foretagsarkiv, which in 1985 was restructured as a non-profit association with the whole county as its collecting area. The initiative came from the business director Erik Brulin and the archivist of the municipality, Anne-Marie Lenander Fallstrom. Their ambition was to save older business archives at risk from the reconstruction and closing down of businesses in the 1970s. The 1985 restructuring was made in order to be eligible for a grant from the county council and to increase its target area. The institution has since been run in close collaboration with the popular movement's archives in Orebro county. According to its statute it is aimed at 'companies, other associations or private persons connected with the business sector'.

As a result of the National Archives survey of business archives, Naringslivsarkiv i Norrland (NIN), was founded in 1985. This was initiated by

the administrative board in Vasternorrland county as part of its political support for regional archival activities. The purpose of NIN as a non-profit organisation is to give companies in the north of Sweden the opportunity to preserve their archives, to give companies advice on archival matters, and to promote research.

Foretagsarkivet i Westerbotten, a non-profit organisation, was initiated in 1987 by the chamber of commerce in Vasterbotten. Its purpose is to collect, preserve and make archival records available for research. The collection consists of business archives from companies in Vasterbotten county. Foretagsarkivet also gives advice, but only to members.

Finally, in 1995, Foreningen foretagens arkiv i Sormland in Eskilstuna was founded, supposedly as a result of the National Archives campaign 'Save business archives!' In connection with this, seminars were held in Eskilstuna with representatives from the National Archives, the municipality of Eskilstuna and companies from the county, and the first step towards the founding of a business archive repository was taken.

Besides these institutions there are Hedstromsdalsarkivet in Kolsva and Nordvastskanes foretagsarkiv. Information about these is scarce as they are each built around the archives of particular enterprises, Kolsva iron mill and Helsingborg shipyard. There are also plans to create a business archive repository in Uppsala county.

Special archival institutions for business archives are thus a relatively recent phenomenon. The development has been towards a few independent regional business archives unevenly spread across the country. Most institutions base their activity on their county, partly in order to be eligible for regional subsidies. With one exception, all institutions are organised as non-profit associations. This might be as a result of the Swedish system of state allowances for cultural activities, but it is also deeply rooted in Swedish tradition: mutual concerns are usually handled through associations.

A difference compared to the popular movements' archives, which are initiated by the popular movements themselves, is the involvement of other interested parties in the setting up of business archives. Support from business has been vital, but the original initiators have often been representatives from the regional government or municipalities, or some of the public archival institutions.

### **Branch organisations**

One organisation, Naringslivets arkivrad (NLA), has had a great influence of records and archives management in Swedish companies. NLA was set up in 1954 by a group of business archivists and the association was formally founded in 1957. Membership is open to companies, institutions and private persons. The founding of NLA was partly a reaction against governmental dominance of the archival system. The purpose was to meet businesses need for records and archives management through training and publications. The issue of appropriate training of archival personnel has always been important to NLA and it has organised extensive educational activities.

In 1986 the archival institutions responsible for business archives founded an organisation for co-operation, Naringlivsarkivens samarbetsorganisation (NAS). Its purpose was to raise awareness of business archives and promote regional institutions. A year later NAS was restructured to form Naringlivsarkivens forening (NAF). In 1989 NAF, in co-operation with NLA, the National Archives, and the Swedish association of employers, established a foundation to support the building of regional business archive repositories.

### **Training and research**

Modern Swedish archives management might be said to have been established in 1903 when the director-general of the National Archives published an article in which he confirmed the principle of provenance as the foundation for handling archives. Thus the embryo to a profession with its own methodology was created. It would, however, take years before this was codified in formal training and education. But as early as 1901 the National Archives offered a training course for newly recruited officials to the National Archives. There was no fixed curriculum for the course, it was planned individually and it would take as long as the 1960s before the National Archives would offer a more structured training programme for the employees of the National Archives and the provincial archives.

Earlier, in the mid 1950s, Naringlivets arkivrad was founded. One of its aims was to provide training for its members – a sign of an unfulfilled need for training among archivists outside the public sector. NLA has organised a number of short courses and seminars, generally aimed at practical work.

The academic education of archivists started in the 1970s. In 1973 the first step was taken when the University of Stockholm ran a ten-week vocational course with an emphasis on arrangement and description. It was followed by another ten week course that, among other things, dealt with technical issues. In connection with the university reform of 1977 the vocational courses were restructured into 'ordinary' courses and the two ten week courses were combined. Over time the course has been supplemented by additional courses.

In the academic year 1988/1989, the college of Sundsvall/Harnosand, later Mid Sweden University, offered a course. Today you can study archival science to Masters level at the University of Stockholm and Mid Sweden University, and academic courses are offered at four other universities. A professor was appointed at the University of Stockholm in 1995, and Mid Sweden University has recruited a visiting professor. Archival science is thus acknowledged as an academic discipline.

At the start in 1973 training was aimed at employees within the governmental sector, primarily in the archival institutions. Since then it has broadened. The courses at Mid Sweden University started out with an emphasis on records management and this is nowadays a part of almost all archival education. At the University of Lund, however, the education remains focused on institutional work.

There is a vast and probably increasing demand for further and supplementary training outside the academic system. This leaves room for both specific and general courses. Technological developments create a need for a continuous enhancement of professional knowledge. There are several players in this arena; one of the most important is the above mentioned NLA. The professional associations and branch organisations also offer some training courses, and there are also commercial enterprises busy in the same line of work.

Whether the setting up of academic courses has resulted in the establishment of a scientific discipline or not is debatable. Archival science has existed at least in name since the 18th century. In Sweden Emil Hildebrand as early in 1904, 70 years before the first academic course was established, defined archival science as '...the systematic description of the ground rules for the founding, regulation and preservation of archives', ie guidelines for the day-to-day handling of archives. Recently a discussion has emerged over whether the discipline can be called a science or not. There is no agreement on what is meant by archival science, nor on what constitutes a scientific discipline. It is understood that many of those who promote and define the need for an archival science primarily want adequate professional training, and they have less need for the development of scientific theories and methods for research.

Academic research has so far been very limited and consists mainly of the theses that are produced by students at Mid Sweden University and the University of Stockholm. The few dissertations that touch on the subject have been written in other departments, mainly history. Outside the academic world some research, or at least development work, has been done as part of the daily work within the archival institutions.

### **The legitimacy of the profession**

In his analysis of the development of the archive profession in America, Richard J. Cox claims that acknowledgement from society is the weakest point in the development of the profession. This is also true in Sweden, although the increase in archival education could be seen as a sign of recognition of the profession. Increasingly, you need an archival academic education to be employed as an archivist. But, there is no fixed definition of an archivist, nor agreement about the competencies that an archivist should possess. Within the National Archives and the provincial archives there is some kind of hierarchy, but this is linked to academic achievement rather than archival qualifications. In his analysis, Cox represents a 'historicistic' view of archival activities and suggests that the archivists' task primary is to preserve historical sources. This shows the dichotomy between archivists and records managers that has grown up in the Anglo-Saxon world, mainly in the United States. This view, would be regarded as much too narrow from a European or Swedish perspective, but even here it has its supporters. A clearly 'historicistic' view of the profession is claimed by, for example, representatives from ARK, the union to which academically trained archivists belong. That attitude mirrors to a great extent the picture that archivists have of themselves. Most applicants to the academic

courses in archival science in Sweden have a background and main interest in the humanities. Their aim, at least at the beginning of the course, is to work with historical sources at some archival institution. This attitude hardly helps them gain employment within business, and is altogether unrealistic for organisations requiring modern archives management.

There are other voices however. Since the 1970s the development of information management has influenced archival work and raised questions about the profession's content and *raison d'être*. An interesting debate was held in 1997-1998 in the journal, *Tema Arkiv*, which is published by the various branch organisations, concerning the concept 'archivist'. The topics debated were mainly about whether the professional title was adequate or if it gave an out-dated impression, thereby limiting the labour-market for archivists. Pros and cons were aired, but in general there was an agreement on the scope of the profession. Besides traditional archival services, almost everyone included, and even emphasised, records management and the handling of information. Not surprisingly, none of those involved in the debate represented the public archival institutions, but all worked within companies.

One conclusion is that there exists a discrepancy between the 'ideal' archivist and the demands of the 'real world'. Possibly this is due to the fact that the professional organisations and the professional discussion have been dominated by representatives from the public sector. Archivists employed at the large, public institutions have had the resources and the time to write and publish, and have taken precedence in the formulation of the problems. Those working within business have not had the same opportunities to become involved. Interestingly enough, outside the governmental sector it was representatives from business who were the first to profile themselves through the establishment of NLA 1957 and the publishing of the journal *Arkivinformation* the same year.

The educational institutions have some responsibility for the present situation, and perhaps it would take a reorganisation of the current academic archival training to solve the problem. Historically, integration between records and archives management has been more of an ideal than a custom. That, together with technological developments and restructuring of society, might force a specialisation of the profession. The specialisation will probably not relate to different sectors in society, but the connection between the organisations' demand for efficient handling of information and a more or less traditional institutional service. Regardless of where you work, public or private sector, the problems are much the same. This might seem to be contradictory to the recent international interest in the continuum perspective, but it is perhaps a logical development given the Swedish tradition.