

**CALL FOR PAPERS**

Private Interests or National Heritage?

Corporate Archives and the Production of History in a Global Perspective

An International Workshop organised jointly by the Unit for Economic History at Gothenburg University and the Regional State Archives in Gothenburg

Keynote speakers:

**Elizabeth Shepherd**, Ph D, professor and director of research at Archives and Records management studies, UCL. She is author of *Archives and Archivists in 20th Century England* (Ashgate, 2009) and serves on the editorial board of the journals *Archival Science: Journal of the Society of Archivists* and *the Record Management Journal*.

**Charles Harvey** is Professor of Business History and Management at Newcastle University Business School. In a distinguished career he has published numerous highly regarded articles on a wide range of topics in business history, management and organisation studies. He was a long time editor of the journal *Business History*.

**Venue:** Regional State Archives in Gothenburg

**Date:** November 24th–25th 2016

As in many fi elds of social life, history has seen a turn to a transnational or global perspective, asking questions about the patterns and variations across and between rather than simply within countries. Corporate archives are preserved for a variety of reasons. Likewise they are preserved in a multitude of diff erent places and under a multitude of diff erent conditions. Th ese variations might refl ect diff erences in how corporate records are viewed and valued, to whom they are seen to belong, and in the uses to which it is believed they can be put. Sometimes companies retain records out of habit or inertia. Others have a more active interest in preserving their history and perhaps in preparing for writing that history. Th e archive can be used for branding and marketing purposes, for image creation by the companies, for change management or for other strategic purposes. Some corporate archives are collected and organized to the highest standards of the archive profession, while others are merely a result of requirements to keep specifi c records. Other companies, whether purposefully or otherwise, rarely retain archives or regularly destroy them/their records and documents. Th e fate of an archive when a company dies is another important question, as is the fate of the archives of state-owned enterprises experiencing privatization. In general, corporate owners of archives do not always recognize the contemporary value or historical importance of their records.

Nonetheless, it is increasingly acknowledged that corporate archives can provide important material which enable new perspectives and alternative histories to be written and that they are useful not only for business historians and those commissioned to write corporate histories, but that they can also provide rich material and valuable sources for political and economic historians, and for social, labour, and cultural historians. Private archives in general and the corporate archives in particular, can, moreover, also be valuable for wider groups of users and many stakeholders have interest in the archives. Apart from owners and historians, the corporate archive can be valuable for museums, local communities and the public in general.

However, private corporate archives are not always considered important to either national heritage or to historical writing. State archives are oft en charged with preserving what might be thought of as the public history of the nation. Private corporate archives might be seen as having an inferior status to offi cial governmental archives.

Moreover, not even national archives have unlimited resources. There is then very little consistency or consensus about how, where or why corporate archives might be preserved and made available. This inconsistency poses a potential threat to our understanding of the relationship between corporations, enterprise, and society.

Thus, as we have noted, corporate archives are preserved in many different venues, by many different bodies, and for many different reasons. Besides private corporate archives stored in-house by the companies themselves, they can be preserved in large private organisations, which retain private collections, they can be deposited in museums or in national or regional public archives, in libraries, and in university collections. But if there is considerable variation and inconsistency at the national level then how much truer is this at an international or global level? What patterns can be observed? What are the implications of such patters, and what can they tell us? This is the focus of our workshop.

Our sense is that choices around the institutions and practices of the archive have real implications for the kinds of history generated. Are we correct in this? Our aim in organizing this conference on corporate archives in global perspective is not simply to gain an overview of patterns and differences between countries but also to enquire as to what consequences these patterns and variations have for the production, dissemination, and reception of history. The international perspective will, it is intended, throw these issues into sharper relief.

We are delighted to announce a two-day conference, to be hosted by the Regional State Archives in Gothenburg, Sweden (organsied jointly with Unit of Economic History at Gothenburg University), with the aim of beginning to consider and address these questions. We are seeking the participation of historians, archivists, and business owners and managers.

Questions that might be considered include but are not limited to:

* What patterns and differences in the handling of private corporate archives can be observed from an international perspective?
* How do these patterns and differences impact what is preserved and stored, how it is organized, who has access to it, and how (and by whom) it is used?
* What is the role of public archives for private ones? Have models of organizations of material in public archive ‘spilled over’ on how private archives are organized?
* What challenges and opportunities are created in this area by the rise of Multinational Enterprises and other forms of transnational organization and institution?
* If there are variations to be observed, then can we see any sign of convergence on international norms and standards, as is happening in other fields of social life?
* How might observed variations be explained? How important are legal contexts, for example through variation in legal requirements for record keeping and corporate reporting?
* Do observed patterns reflect deep across societies and cultures in terms of their relationship to history and the historical record? In other words, what might a society’s archiving choices tell us about its relationship to and use of history? Such variations might also alert us to variations in socio-cultural attitudes towards private interests versus the public good.
* Similarly, we are interested in the implications of any variations that might be observed have for the kinds of history that is preserved and for the kinds of histories (that might be textual or take many other forms) that are produced, from one country to another?

We invite paper proposals dealing with any of these topics. Dead-line for proposal is September 1st, 2016.

Please address the proposals and all expressions of interest to either Susanna Fellman

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