



LUND UNIVERSITY

353 years of University archiving

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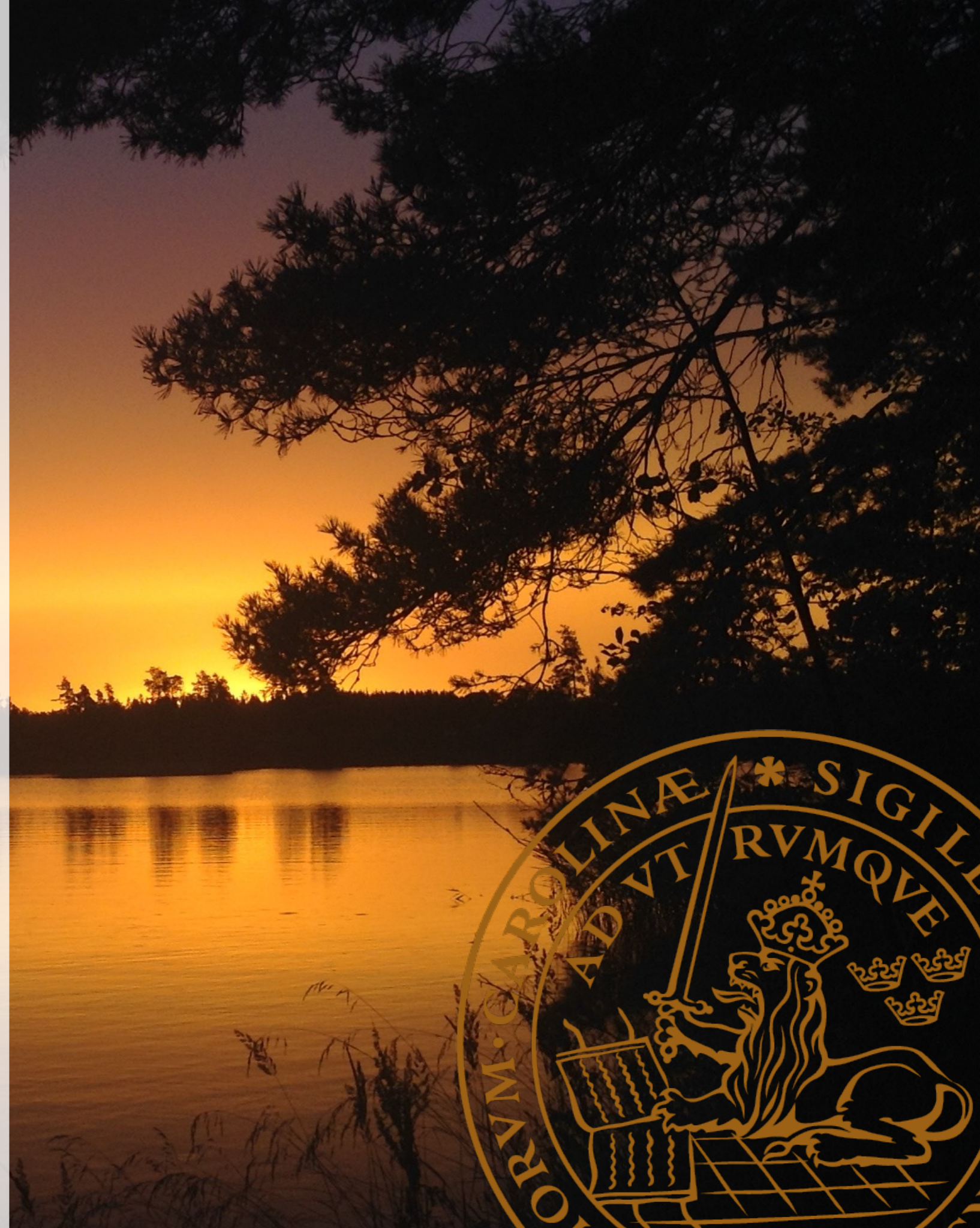
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

TEACHER TIMES

GRADUATE SCHOOL – TEACHER & FRIENDS NEWSLETTER

- 2 Letter from the Director of Studies
- 3 What's Brewing – Graduate School news & info
- 8 New University Leadership – Interview with our previous Pro-Dean, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Lena Eskilsson
- 12 Quality Assurance processes
- 15 Vice-Chancellor's Corona Report
- 19 Graduate School Alumni Network
- 22 *Social Scientific Data Analysis* programme – greeting from the Director
- 24 Understanding the Uni: 353 years of archiving
- 29 Digital learning environment

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353 YEARS OF UNIVERSITY ARCHIVING

Did you know that Lund University's archive started life in a former toilet more than 300 years ago? No? We asked Fredrik Tersmeden, archivist and records-digger supremo at Lund University Archives to walk us through a long and winding history. His text takes us through the evolution of the archives from their humble beginnings in that former privy to the truly enormous (physical as well as digital) archive that is today located at Arkivcentrum Syd.

Graduate School – Understanding the Uni

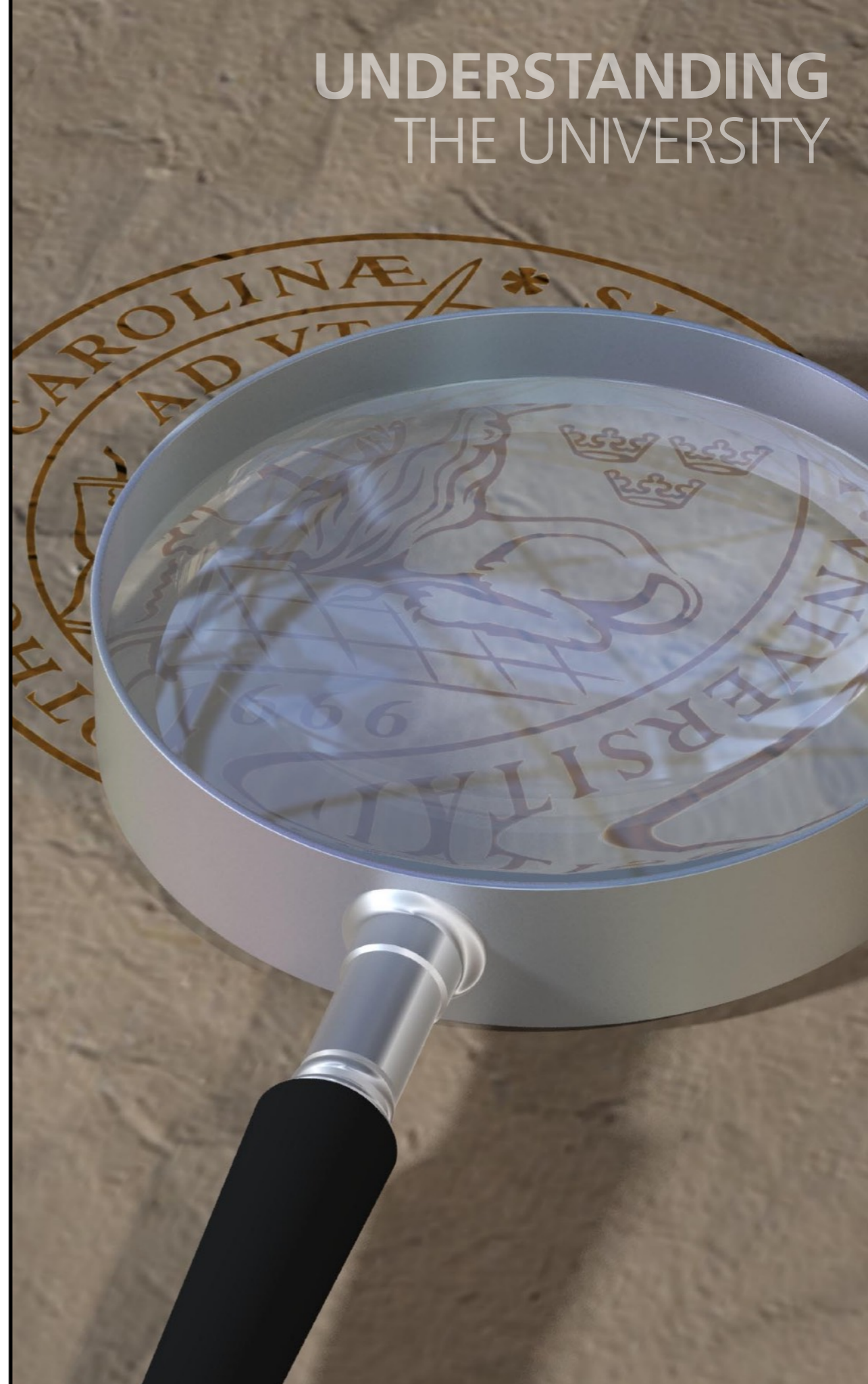


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UNDERSTANDING
THE UNIVERSITY



The university's archives – from a few documents in a coffer to a service organisation for both the University and the general public

An institution as old as the university

After a complete lack of its own premises during its first 20 years, Lund University (LU) received its first building in 1688, the so-called Kungshuset in Lundagård. However, this former private home was dilapidated at the time, and several alterations and repairs were needed to adapt the building to its new function. For example, on the second floor there was an extension on the north side that had previously accommodated an outhouse, that is, an outdoor toilet – but indoors, so to speak. But in 1688 this little “box” on the facade of the building was filled with the university's important collected documents. A former toilet had thus become Lund University's first permanent archive room...

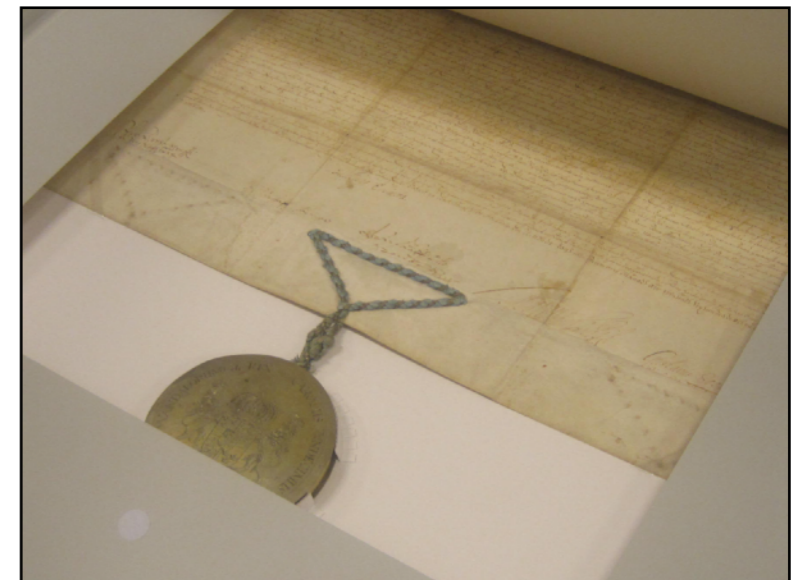
The fact that it took 20 years for the university's archive documents to receive a specially designated place did not mean that they had previously been ignored. Already in the university's oldest governing document, the so-called “Constitutions” from 1666, there are a number of regulations concerning the responsibility and handling of the university's archive documents. In conjunction with the promotion of a new rector (which then took place once every six months) the academy secretary would, “in the presence of the rector



*Detail from a painting from 1767 which shows Kungshuset seen from the north, and where you can see the outhouse which was converted into an archive room in 1688
(Photo credit: Lund University Library)*

lay down the consistory's judgements and rulings into the archive”. During the university's first years, this “archive” probably only consisted of a coffer, or chest, in practice, to be kept by the rector or the academy secretary, most likely in the cathedral where the university's *consistory* (board) would meet. During the Scanian War of 1675-79, we know that the archive was kept in a coffer in St. Petri Church in Malmö, to where the university's most important assets had then been evacuated. And it was lucky, because unlike Malmö, Lund was badly damaged by fires and the fighting that broke out during this war. Had the university's oldest documents remained in Lund, there is a good chance that they no longer would exist – something that shows that good and safe handling of our documents was as imperative then as it is now!

But the preservation of an extensive amount of information can most often lead to unmanageable chaos. It is therefore telling that one of the earliest documents in Lund's University Archives is an inventory of the archive itself! The first inventory document dates as early as the inauguration year of 1668 and includes the university's oldest and most important document: the four letters issued by Carl XI's guardian government in December 1666, which formed the very basis for the university's existence. This inventory also includes various other government decisions, correspondence with other authorities such as the university's chancellor and the governor general of Skåne, as well as documents concerning the university's finances – everything that the university itself needed to keep track of in its daily running activities.



One of the University's four oldest (and most important) archival documents: the 1666 “foundation letter” (Photo credit: Fredrik Tersmeden)

For a long time, it was the case that the university's archives and top management and administration were located at the same place. During the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries the archive was where the rector, the academy secretary and the academy rent master sat. The choice to make the old toilet in Kungshuset into an archive room was no coincidence: directly next to it was the room that became the consistory's new meeting room. And at the beginning of the 19th century, when the university management moved out of Kungshuset and into a newly built (but now demolished) wing building, the archive followed as well. The reason for the move was that Kungshuset was becoming overcrowded due to the University Library's expansion. And yet

again, relatively soon thereafter, those new premises would also prove insufficient in terms of space. By the 1840s a new room was required as a detention room, (because up until 1852 the university had its own right to judge and punish students who committed crimes). It was found that the room closest to hand first needed to be emptied of “books and documents” belonging to the university’s financial administration, and in the early 1880s the rector complained that his reception room had been turned into a “messy archive room.”

A separate historical archive

The construction of the new, large university building in 1882 provided LU with a temporary solution to the issue of space, but shortly thereafter, an even better result would follow. In 1907 the new University Library (UB) on Helgonabacken was completed. Three years later, in 1910, major portions of the older archive material were transferred there. The university archives had thus been divided into two parts: an older part, primarily of historical interest, that was stored at and maintained by UB, and a smaller, newer part of continued interest for the current administration that would continue to remain with the central administration. Over the years, more and more older documents were transferred to UB, and eventually, most of the archive documents remained there until 1964, which was a turning point of major administrative changes that took place within the university. These collections had then also, in addition to the central administrative material, come to include the faculties’ archives.

The incipient transfer of the older parts of the archive to UB coincided at a time when the Swedish state administration was jointly adopting a new, general system for arranging and listing archives. the so-called “general archive schedule.” The first person mainly responsible for arranging the university’s historical documents was the librarian Fredrik Hjelmqvist, and his work still constitutes the basis for the digital archive lists of the oldest archive material that exists today.

A growing university with a growing archive

The mid-1960s was not just an organisational turning point at Lund University, it was also a time that saw a huge expansion of the business as a whole. Within the span of a few years the number of students quadrupled, which not only led to an increasing production of administrative documents but also of more written study documentation; for example, oral exams were now increasingly replaced by written exams and the amount of written degree projects also sharply increased. In the wake of this expansion, new archival-forming organisational units also emerged, namely, the institutions as we know them today with boards, student influence, own premises, etc. In short, the growth of archival documents

continued strongly, with documents that were both too extensive and too current to be suitable for transfer to the University Library. Instead, binders and bundles of paper were collected in increasingly crowded filing cabinets, offices, basements, cluttering the university’s various administration, teaching and research rooms.

As a result, in 1976, the university hired its first specially employed archivist: Sven Sjölin. During his time, an extensive inventory and listing of the many departmental archives was carried out, and Lund University also received its first computerized archival inventory for archives. But the growing shortage of storage facilities in general, and those that met the safety requirements for fire and water damage in particular, persisted for several more decades. The danger of this was illustrated by the arson that struck the University Building in 1980, in the basement of which several archival documents were stored.

The university archives locate to Arkivcentrum Syd

The solution to the storage issue finally came in the form of a collaboration. In the late 1990s, it was not only Lund University that had an acute shortage of archive space; so did the National Archives in Lund and the newly formed Region Skåne, which took over the old collective county council archives from Malmöhus and Kristianstad counties. The three parties came together to found a joint construction project which would have significant advantages for the collective group. Thus, the plan was born to build an “Archive Centre” in connection with some of the existing archive magazines that the National Archives already utilised at Gastelyckan, the industrial area southeast of central Lund.

In March 2001, the shovel was put in the ground, and less than a year later, “Arkivcentrum Syd” was ready for occupancy. The formal inauguration took place on April 25, 2003 with a ceremonial ribbon-cutting by the Governor (Landshövdingen) Bengt Holgersson. In addition to the original three parties, a number of other organisations with similar archive needs also joined the collaboration, including Lund City Archives, the Police Authority in Skåne and the Skåne Archives Association (an organisation for archives from the non-profit sector such as associations and popular movements).

For the first time in modern times, Lund University started collecting all of its archive documents and storing them in one place, one that was in accordance with the many security requirements imposed by the National Archives. Among the first stocks to be displayed on the new shelves – which were motorised metal trolleys 10 metres wide and 7 metres high on two floors – were the older historical documents that had been moved to UB almost one hundred years earlier. After that, work began to progress in the collection the documents from the past half century – which are much more extensive than those from the first 300 years – and this work is still going on today, almost 20 years later. During the first years, it was primarily external factors such as reorganisations, room

renovations, and the like, within the university that dictated the kind of material was delivered to the new central archive. In recent years, however, more systematic work has been conducted with the aim of gathering all administrative and educational documents produced up until 2013/2014 (which was when the previously mentioned “general archive schedule” ceased to apply and the archives therefore began to be structured in a new way). This work has mainly been handled by a “pool” of archivists, who have been organisationally linked to the central archive function, but whose services could be purchased by departments, faculties, centres and the like. The end of this extensive effort is in sight, but some work remains, mainly within the Faculty of Medicine. In parallel, recent work has focused on collecting research documents.

The original Arkivcentrum Syd consisted of an office building and four archival repositories with a total capacity of 130,000 shelf metres of documents. From the very beginning, however, there were plans for future expansion, and after a decade, this was implemented in 2012–2013. The facility grew with a further number of house bodies, and the storage capacity rose to 450,000 shelf metres – i.e. 4.5 kilometres of archive documents! For the University Archives, the expansion entailed more suitable office space for its growing staff and also that Folklivsarkivet, which had previously been part of the Department of Ethnology, as well as the university’s zoological and botanical museums, respectively, would be moved to Arkivcentrum Syd. A large amount of printed material previously from the University Library also was stored on the site, making it into a general cultural heritage centre rather than a purely archival ditto.

A support for everyone who handles public records within the university

Organisationally, the University Archives is managed by Record Management, a department within the Section of Legal and Record Management, which in turn belongs to the university-wide administration. The department currently consists of 13 employees. In addition to a large number of archivists – both those who work on site at Arkivcentrum



Photo of Arkivcentrum Syd which houses the University Archive (Photo credit: Fredrik Tersmeden)

Syd and those who are part of the above-mentioned “pool” – the university also employs two central registrars. The very name “Record Management” denotes that the department not only takes charge of older records but also has an overarching responsibility for how university records are handled throughout their entire life cycle: from the time that they are created to the time they are saved for posterity.

This responsibility can be categorically divided into two parts: there is a concrete responsibility to take care of the records that are physically stored in the University Archives’ magazine at Arkivcentrum Syd (currently around 11,000 shelf metres of documents from the 17th century onwards) and there is a more regulatory and pedagogical responsibility for the handling of all current public records that permeate the university’s activities: from paper stacks in individual employees’ offices to tasks in complex digital administrative systems or research databases. The formal responsibility for the latter material, lies with the relevant local managers (prefects or equivalent), but it is Record Management’s task to establish the local rules and governing documents that uphold the national regulations that exist via laws and National Archives regulations and to facilitate this work for managers, administrative staff, teachers and researchers through training and system support (for example via the diary system W3D3).

A key document in this work is the “Record Management Plan,” a comprehensive document in tabular form, which consists of 73 small print pages that can certainly look daunting at first glance. However, it is not a document that is intended to be read from beginning to end, let alone to be memorised, but functions rather as a kind of encyclopaedia. The document’s main objective is to help individuals find any type of public document within Lund University’s collective work processes and to figure out how it should be handled: to see what should be registered and in which system, or to what can be sorted out vs. that which should be preserved forever, etc. In the incredibly broad and



A typical archive corridor at Arkivcentrum Syd (Photo credit: Fredrik Tersmeden)

multifaceted business that is Lund University – which deals with everything from handling aircraft and state-of-the-art research facilities to promoting doctors in centuries-old ritual forms – the sheer amount of documentation is beyond enormous, and many individual employees only come into contact with a minor subset of the operation. The Record Management Plan can be found on LU’s Staff Pages on record management:

tinyurl.com/LUdochandlingSWE (Swedish)

and

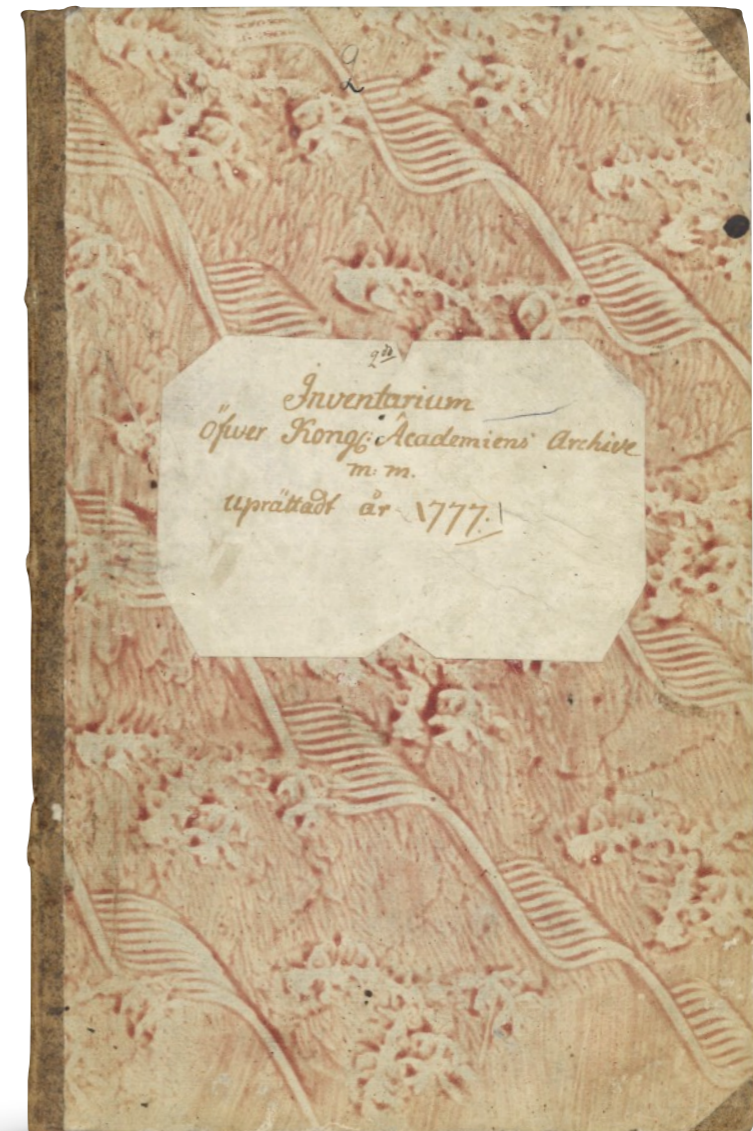
tinyurl.com/LUdochandlingENG (English)

and the document is updated regularly. If you seek a particular type of document and cannot find it in the plan, do not hesitate to contact the Record Management department!

During the majority of Lund University’s history, its archival documents have consisted of what are now usually called “analogue” documents, also known as paper documents. In recent decades, however, more and more of the university’s collected information has been handled digitally – from individual employees’ computers to large digital support systems. This puts a new and much more difficult demand on archive management, because while paper can last for centuries if stored at the right temperature, humidity and light conditions, a digital file can be rendered unreadable within a few years due to changes in software or lack of associated metadata. In other words, archiving digital records requires a proactive approach in order to prevent the potential loss of information in the future. The university has very recently procured its first e-archive, a technical solution called the Long-Term Archive, in order to help navigate this. The first tests of delivering digital material to this e-archive have now begun.

Nonetheless, a very large proportion of the information that both staff and the public request from Lund University is such that it is only or mainly on paper. To handle all of these inquiries, the University Archives always has an on-call archivist who answers requests that come in by e-mail (universitetsarkivet@legal.lu.se) or telephone (extension 216 70), and these are many. In 2020, the University Archives’ service handled almost 2,300 such requests. There is also the opportunity – not least for researchers who may need to go through large amounts of documents – to study the archives on site in the common reading room at Arkivcentrum Syd. Unfortunately, these opportunities are currently in corona times limited to a few hours per week, but when the pandemic is over, we at the University Archives would be happy to see more researchers within the university come here and discover the goldmine for research that is hidden in its own archive.

Fredrik Tersmeden, Archivist at the Lund University Archives



*Cover of an inventory of University Archive contents from 1777
(scanned from original; credits: Lund University Archives)*