



Role Profile

Role: Lead Researcher

Project: The Rum Story Re-Imagined Project

Organisation: Whitehaven Harbour Commissioners

Overview of role

We are looking to contract an experienced researcher to undertake historical research to support the phase 1 re-interpretation of parts of The Rum Story in Whitehaven.

The Rum Story and its history

The Rum Story visitor attraction in Whitehaven tells the history of the Jefferson family's business, which involved rum, shipping and the trading and enslavement of African people. The history of the Jefferson family sits alongside a wider history of Whitehaven as a significant shipping port, built first on mining and then by the wealth generated by the Transatlantic trade of enslaved African people. The town was one of the most important UK ports. This allowed some people to generate wealth through involvement in trading enslaved African people.

Set in the original 1785 shop, cellars, bonded warehouse and courtyard of the Jefferson family business, the attraction depicts life in 18th century Whitehaven. History is in abundance. The ground floor immerses visitors in an Antiguan rainforest before sugar plantations were there. The first floor looks like a ship and covers what life was like in African villages before people were enslaved, the Transatlantic trade and trafficking of enslaved African people, and making rum. The second floor is about rum, the navy, the Jeffersons, prohibition, pirates and Whitehaven.

The Rum Story Re-Imagined Project

The Rum Story is for everybody but like many heritage attractions, it's not yet engaging everyone. It was created in 2000 and needs to be more accessible, inclusive and engaging. The way it currently tells history aligns with how it is told by the wider heritage sector and dilutes the extent of Britain's role in the Transatlantic trade of enslaved African people and how it profited. The [Rum Story Re-Imagined](#) is a partnership project between Whitehaven Harbour Commissioners and Anti Racist Cumbria that aims to address these issues and put Whitehaven firmly on the UK heritage map.

[Anti Racist Cumbria](#) is a charity, tackling racism through action and education to create a forward-thinking and actively anti-racist Cumbria. [Whitehaven Harbour Commissioners](#) is a not-for-profit organisation, which is the custodian of Whitehaven Harbour and owns The

Rum Story. All revenue generated is reinvested back into the harbour and wider estate for the benefit of its community.

Guiding principles for the project are safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, empowerment, inclusion, equity and accessibility. Here are the project's aims:

1. Lots more people - from all walks of life - visit The Rum Story and come back again
2. The attraction is more accessible, thought-provoking and innovative
3. A complete history is told, including less well-known narratives
4. People get interested in our shared heritage - curious about how past links to present
5. Local people actively participate in preserving and sharing Whitehaven's heritage
6. The team becomes upskilled on best practice in telling histories of enslavement
7. Wider social and economic benefits are generated for the local area

Phase 1 (2025-26) has been made possible by The National Lottery Heritage Fund. Its focus is on finding out how people think we should achieve our aims, using these ideas to create a recommendations report and implementing some of the early recommendations to improve the attraction. We are reaching out to individuals, businesses, creative and community organisations, schools, universities, researchers, think tanks, funders, government, museums and more to gather feedback/ideas - through workshops, events, surveys and meetings. Phase 2 (2026-30, subject to funding) is about putting the rest of the recommendations into place.

The Transatlantic trade of enslaved African people is a challenging history to confront. Sometimes this has led to people avoiding accepting how Britain benefited from enslaving African people and how much it was involved. This project is interested in exploring how that history can be told in an honest, in-depth way. The attraction talks about enslavement but the way history is told is often shaped by who had the power and means to dominate the narrative at the time. We want to ensure that narratives not currently told or told in a harmful way in The Rum Story are heard and told better.

The Lead Researcher role

We are looking to contract a Lead Researcher to undertake historical research that provides the factual basis behind the phase 1 re-interpretation of parts of The Rum Story. Research will be on the following subjects and ways in which they are intertwined:

- Whitehaven - how it has evolved and what it was like in the 18th century
- The Jefferson Family, their businesses and philanthropy
- The Transatlantic trading, trafficking and enslavement of African people and its legacies
- The production of rum on sugar plantations in Antigua in the 18th century and to date
- Antigua before and after colonisation
- The life and culture of people from West African countries before enslavement and after

The Lead Researcher will be responsible for:

- Confirming the precise scope of topics to be researched (based on guidance and direction from the project team)
- Locating and accessing information/sources/artefacts relating to history to be researched

- Undertaking historical research on agreed aspects of The Rum Story's history
- Detailing the evidence/source materials behind all research to make its origin clear
- Making sense of historical records, sources and artefacts and translating them into engaging, accessible wording, images and materials for the exhibition
- Finding ways to fill in gaps where evidence of histories to present is fragmentary, e.g. researching something similar, piecing evidence together, making educated guesses and clearly communicating when this approach has been taken and why
- Researching aspects that have been less visible, e.g. the voices, experience, lives and agency of people who were enslaved and oppressed
- Uncovering facts/angles/case studies that make the history human and relatable
- Building in procedures for all research, text and materials to be checked for accuracy, accessibility and fit with project aims and guiding principles
- Working closely with the project team
- Making all research material collected available to The Rum Story
- Overseeing some research by volunteers and recommending how it can feed in

Experience, skills and qualities needed

- Significant historical research experience and a relevant qualification
- Able to work sensitively, objectively and in a balanced way
- Committed to helping make The Rum Story accessible and thought-provoking and to telling a more complete history, centring Black perspectives and lesser-known narratives
- Experience working with histories of enslavement or contested/traumatic histories
- Excellent communication - able to translate complex info into accessible materials
- Experience of working in a museum or heritage context
- Committed to applying an anti-racist and anti-oppression approach to this work

Budget and timeframe

We have a budget of up to £8,400 to contract someone on a self-employed basis as Lead Researcher. This assumes a day rate of up to £280 and the person carrying out up to 30 days' work. We also have a small travel, subsistence and accommodation budget that we can make available for the Lead Researcher as required.

Activity	Dates
Complete appointment of Lead Researcher	Sep 25
Do research for phase 1 re-interpretation of parts of The Rum Story	Sep - Nov 25
Phase 1 re-interpretation work carried out	Oct - Jan 26
Display opens to the public	Feb 26

How to apply

Email your application to project manager Katy Haigh (contact details below) by 12pm on 13 August 2025. It should include a CV and a submission detailing:

1. Why you would like to undertake this role and work on this project
2. Why you would be suitable, giving examples of relevant experience you have

3. A costed proposal for how you would approach the research, including timescale
4. What does centring Black people in the debate mean to you, including examples?
5. Contact details for two referees
6. Details of Professional Liability/Professional Indemnity insurance

Please keep each document to a maximum of 2 A4 pages.

Further details

We will carry out interviews for this role early September in person at The Rum Story. We intend to run these on 2 and 3 September.

We particularly welcome applications from Black and Global Majority people who've managed research projects of this nature or with experience of managing similar projects.

Feel free to contact Katy on katy.haigh@rumstory.co.uk or 07846 066 986 to discuss this role. Visit rumstory.co.uk/about/rum-story-re-imagined to find out more about the project.

This is a hybrid role. Some work will need to take place at The Rum Story, but much can take place remotely – with travel expected to archives in Cumbria/Lancaster and possibly further afield. We can work flexibly if work is delivered effectively. This role will be line-managed by The Rum Story Re-Imagined Project Manager.

We will pay monthly and in arrears for this role.

Care package

Leading this research will involve working closely with challenging and potentially triggering histories of enslavement and its legacies. Because of this we will:

- Support the Lead Researcher through the opportunity to debrief after meetings/events
- Allow them to use spaces while they are unused, such as desk space or meeting rooms
- Offer the use of organisational resources, such as printers, where possible
- Offer access to free training opportunities that are available to the wider project team
- Offer access to funded [racial trauma and wellbeing support](#) from Rowan Carr, who is qualified in Embodied Coaching and Somatic Approaches to Healing Racial Trauma