



Role profile

Role: Re-Interpretation Specialist

Project: The Rum Story Re-Imagined Project

Organisation: Whitehaven Harbour Commissioners

Overview of role

We want to appoint a Re-Interpretation Specialist to lead the re-interpretation of The Rum Story - to propose, design and implement changes that help tell the history better and make it more engaging, relevant and accessible for a wide range of audiences.

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 currently engaging everyone. It was created in 2000 and needs to become 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.

More about the current attraction

The current Rum Story is laid out over three floors in the building where Jefferson's rum used to be produced and sold. History is in abundance, and it is a spacious building.

The ground floor immerses visitors in an Antigua rainforest, before sugar plantations were there. It shows the original Jefferson's office and bonded warehouse. The first floor looks like a ship. It covers what life was like in African villages before people were enslaved, the Transatlantic trade and trafficking of enslaved Black Africans, the Middle Passage, sugar plantations in Antigua, how rum is made, and indenture. The second floor is about rum in the navy, the Jefferson's warehouse, coopering, revolution and prohibition, pirates and smuggling, proofing spirits, rum labels, and a photo gallery.

Concerns that have been raised about some aspects of the current displays include that:

- It's got a topsy turvy flow, which makes it hard to follow
- Some juxtapositions of uncomfortable next to jokey sentiments feel inappropriate
- There are issues with the power dynamics - much is told from a white perspective
- There is limited agency of Black people apparent
- The slavery section is quite traumatic

- Some information is inaccurate or tells an incomplete, overly simplified story.

Project deliverables

Throughout 2025, Phase 1 of the project is taking place and The Rum Story Re-Imagined Project Manager is consulting with a wide range of stakeholders and working with them to shape the project. At the end of Phase 1 - by February 2026 - the project will deliver:

- Tangible improvements to the attraction that make it more engaging and accessible and tell the history in a way that is shaped by the community, and which doesn't shy away from recounting a full picture.
- A report based on the consultation process that sets out recommendations and a feasibility study for a plan to deliver Phase 2 of the project, by 2030 - activities to achieve project aims that require more resource and time to be delivered.
- An independent evaluation of this National Lottery Heritage Funded project and the impacts that Phase 1 has had - intended and unintended.

The Re-Interpretation Specialist brief

We are looking to appoint a Re-Interpretation Specialist to lead the re-interpretation of The Rum Story visitor attraction - to propose, design and implement changes that:

- Result in an attraction that tells the story of Whitehaven and the Jefferson family rum business and directly talks about the Transatlantic Slave Trade and how the Jeffersons and Whitehaven benefitted from it.
- Help people explore and make sense of its history, artefacts and legacies and encourage them to think for themselves, reflect and learn.
- Tell this history in a way that is shaped by the community and doesn't shy away from recounting a full picture – particularly centring Black people's views and perspectives and the views and perspectives of enslaved and oppressed people.
- Are really shaped and driven by conversations and feedback happening in the project consultation and engagement process with different communities.
- Make it more engaging, relevant and accessible for a wide range of audiences.
- Help people share their history and perspectives, especially where they have been excluded in the past, and may lead to greater empathy and cohesion.
- Actively change the kind of information and ideas shared with visitors, e.g. to provoke thought about language and how we use it, about how this history might apply to the present, and to get people reflecting on their emotional responses.
- Help make visitors feel engaged and empowered - intellectually and emotionally.

With input from the Project Manager, Lead Researcher, project team and learnings collated through consultation, the Re-Interpretation Specialist will be responsible for creating a clear re-interpretation plan that sets out what changes should be made to The Rum Story in Phase 1 to help achieve the project aims. We have allocated a budget for the phase 1 re-interpretation work but some of this is committed to practical costs linked to the re-interpretation, e.g. addressing lighting issues and conservation cleaning. The plan should have clear objectives and methods, proportionate to the project size, and should set out:

- What will be re-interpreted
- Who the audience is
- Key messages that visitors need to understand

- Tools that will be used to communicate with the audience, e.g. audio, films, displays, signage, artefacts, panels, sensory/interactive elements, digital media
- What we want people to feel, learn and take away from The Rum Story
- Who will be involved in developing the re-interpretation
- What the visitor experience will look and feel like

The Re-Interpretation Specialist will be responsible for:

- Compiling briefs for interpretation elements
- Approaching contractors for estimates and quotes and costing this work
- Setting out a detailed timetable and plan for delivering it
- Getting sign-off from project partners to implement the plan
- Delivering the agreed re-interpretation work on time and to budget

All re-interpretation work must be in place by January 2026, ready to be launched February 2026.

Below are likely priorities for the re-interpretation but we will confirm these when this role starts as recommendations are still in development:

- Designing the journey/flow through the exhibition
- Initial messaging to set the scene, manage expectations and prepare visitors
- The first floor
- Re-interpreting blocked off sections and panels, which we consider to be harmful
- Making the attraction more accessible, interactive and sensory
- Creating space for people to reflect in/have as a safe space if wanted/needed
- A 10m x 3m room with white panelled walls that paid homage to British Jamaican TV personality and chef, Rustie Lee – it's currently a photo gallery, as we felt the room was doing harm through its stereotyping nature.
- Coming up with proposals/mechanisms that allow for new and temporary content to periodically be added to parts of the attraction in future.

Experience, skills and qualities needed

Experience of:

- Interpretation planning for wide audiences in a museum or heritage context
- Working with uncomfortable or traumatic histories
- Working on the development of exhibitions or permanent galleries
- Project management and effective management of budgets
- Applying an anti-racist and anti-oppression approach in this type of work

Budget and timeframe

We have a budget of up to £9,520 to contract someone on a self-employed basis as the Re-Interpretation Specialist, assuming a day rate of up to £280 and up to 34 days of work. We also have a small travel, subsistence and accommodation budget we can make available as required.

Activity	Dates
Complete appointment of Re-Interpretation Specialist	Sep 25

Undertake re-interpretation work as detailed above	Oct – Jan 26
Updated attraction opens to the public	Feb 26

How to apply

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

1. Why you would like to work on this re-interpretation
2. Why you are suitable, giving examples of relevant interpretation experience
3. Your experience of working with Global Majority communities - the values, approaches and skills you brought to this work
4. A costed proposal for how you would approach the re-interpretation, including timescale
5. 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 the 2 or 3 September.

We particularly welcome applications from Black and Global Majority people who have managed re-interpretation projects of this nature before or who have experience of managing such projects.

Feel free to contact Katy on katy.haigh@rumstory.co.uk or 07846 066 986 for an informal discussion about this role, in advance of applying. You can also visit <https://www.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. We can work flexibly if the work is delivered effectively. This role will be line-managed by The Rum Story Re-Imagined Project Manager.

We will pay you monthly and in arrears for this role.

Care package

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

- Support you through the opportunity to debrief after meetings/events
- Allow you 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