THE MARGATE SHELL GROTTO

Discovered: 1835 Number of shells: 4.6 million Length: 104ft Date of construction: Unknown

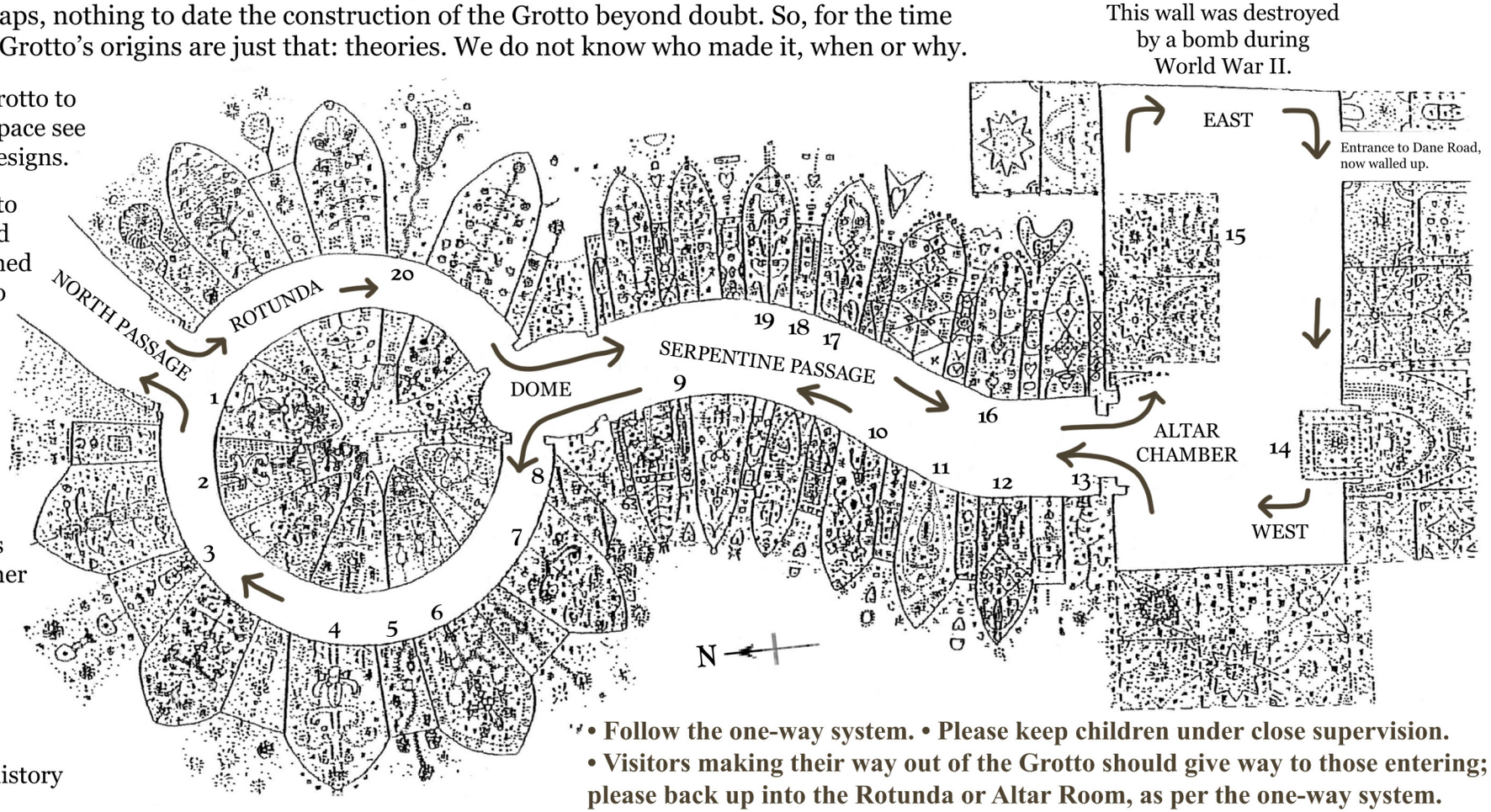
The Grade I-listed Shell Grotto opened to the public in 1838 and has remained a privately-owned attraction since. As yet, no documents that mention the Grotto and pre-date its discovery have been found: no correspondence, no maps, nothing to date the construction of the Grotto beyond doubt. So, for the time being, theories on the Grotto's origins are just that: theories. We do not know who made it, when or why.

Those who believe the Grotto to have been a devotional space see symbolism in the shell designs.

This drawing is thought to be the work of Conan and Nellie Shaw, who published a pamphlet on the Grotto in 1954. Their key to the panels is partly reproduced here.

These definitions are entirely subjective and, indeed, if you prefer to imagine that the Grotto was built for secular uses you will see patterns rather than symbols.

We attempt to answer more questions in the Museum Room. Or you can visit the website:
www.shellgrotto.co.uk/history



• Follow the one-way system. • Please keep children under close supervision. • Visitors making their way out of the Grotto should give way to those entering; please back up into the Rotunda or Altar Room, as per the one-way system.

1. Turtle Panel
2. Aries Panel
3. Phallus Symbol
4. Fleur de Lys Panel
5. Serpent Panel
6. Tortoise Panel
7. Perseus-Snake Panel
8. Eridanus Panel
9. Skeleton Panel (half-size panel)
10. Ankh-Isis Panel
11. Corn Goddess Panel
12. God Bacchus-Scorpion Panel
13. Growing Tree Panel
14. Altar
15. Tree of Life Panel
16. Anchor of Hope Panel
17. God Ganesha Panel
18. Holy Tetrachtys Panel
19. Spine Panel
20. Birth Panel