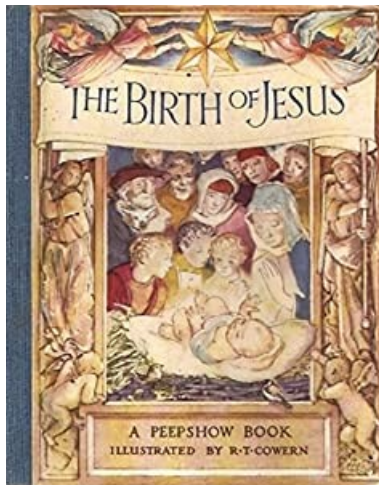




Ripping Reads

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The Birth of Jesus
A Peepshow Book
illustrated by R T Cowern
by Jilly Day

This lovely book with its delicately drawn biblical scenes brings the Christmas story vividly to life. *The Birth of Jesus* was published in 1950, but its opulent gilt framed pages of colourful characters invite comparison with illuminated manuscripts of the monastic era.

I have always been fascinated by pop-up books and three D artwork, but was unclear as to the difference between those art forms and a peepshow book. Put simply, a

peepshow book encourages depth and a sense of perspective by viewing pictures through a hole.

The earliest example of a peepshow can be traced back to the fifteenth century and was the invention of a remarkable man. Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472) was an exemplary example of the Renaissance, being variously a priest working at the papal court, poet, artist and architect. It was Alberti's interest in architectural perspective which caused him to create a box, complete with a tiny hole through which could be viewed his paintings of the heavens. The popular and iconic Victorian end of the pier peepshow cabinet owes much to Alberti's innovative design.

In more recent times the illustrator of my book, *The Birth of Jesus*, was also a talented and interesting individual. Raymond Teague Cowern (1913-1986) was the only son of a Birmingham coal merchant, and was educated at King Edward's Grammar School. He studied at the

