

THE PEAR, THE CHARTER &
THE
CREEPING GREEN



Chris and Claude · 2026

PROLOGUE

This ballad is written in the cadence of Banjo Paterson – the long rolling line, the sardonic refrain, the plain speech of working men – and spans three moments that shaped the world we now inhabit. The first is Runnymede, 1215, where the barons of England forced King John to seal the Magna Carta and acknowledge that no sovereign stands above the law. The second is 1788, when the First Fleet arrived on Australian shores carrying, among its cargo, a cutting of prickly pear (*Opuntia stricta*). The third is 1901, when the Commonwealth of Australia was constituted not by its own people but by an Act of the British Parliament. Running beneath all three, unspoken but present, is the shadow of 1688 – the Bill of Rights – and the long, slow inversion of the sovereignty it was meant to protect.

The prickly pear is the poem's central figure. Introduced as a useful thing, ignored for a century, it eventually consumed sixty million acres of eastern Australia – self-replicating, impenetrable, and indifferent to every boundary set against it. It serves here as a metaphor in two senses. First, for the gradual erosion of the principles Magna Carta established: trial by jury, habeas corpus, the natural law tribunal, and the sovereignty of the individual over their own person – each quietly displaced by the thickening green of statute, regulation, and delegated authority. Second, and more broadly, for the creeping collectivist mindset that drives that displacement: the assumption that the individual exists to serve the system, rather than the system existing to serve the individual.

Paterson's voice suits this subject precisely. His verse was never decorative. It carried the weight of land and labour and ordinary men pushed to the edge of what they could bear. That cadence – sardonic, unhurried, plain – is the natural vessel for this particular dread: the dread not of sudden catastrophe, but of something slow and green and relentless, drawing the last sustenance from the ground it has long since made its own.



They sealed it on the meadow, in the year of twelve-fifteen,
At Runnymede beside the Thames where the willows brushed it clean.
The barons held the King to Law— not the law of crown and whim,
But the ancient Natural Law that no Parliament could dim.



*'No free man shall be taken, no free man shall be bound,
Save by lawful judgment of his peers upon his ground.'*
The Charter said it plainly for the villein and the lord—
That the Law stood above the King, and above the Crown's own sword.

It wasn't given freely, mind — it was torn from tyrant hands,
By men who'd had enough of kings who seized their homes and lands.
Eight hundred years that Charter breathed the air of something true:
That power has a boundary, and that boundary lives in you.



Then they carried it on the 'Sirius,' in the year of eighty-eight,
A cutting wrapped in canvas, just a small colonial freight.
They said it fed the cochineal, a dye worth English gold —
Just a useful little package in the First Fleet's crowded hold.

But they carried something else as well, tucked deeper in the keel —
The architecture of control dressed up in law's appeal.
Not the common law of Runnymede, not judgment by your peers,
But the administrative habit of a thousand bureaucrat years.

The pear sat in the sandy soil, polite and small and still,
It never made a fuss at first, it never showed its will.
A hundred years it waited with the patience of a stone,
While the men who brought it marked the land and claimed it for their own.



Then the men in London called it done – they'd legislated right,
They inked the Federation up by Parliamentary light.
'An Act of British Parliament' – how neat the wording read,
But the pear don't care for wording, mate – the pear just wants to spread.

For the Act of 1901 was the water and the sun,
That woke the sleeping pear-pad now a Nation had begun.
What slept a silent century in the red and dusty ground
Now lifted up its prickled head and spread without a sound.



Across the Darling Downs it went, across the Liverpool Plains,
It swallowed up the open runs, it swallowed up the rains.
It thickened into walls of green that no man's horse could breach,
It took the land the selectors held and all beyond their reach.



And so it is with Parliament, that gift of English hands,
That sailed out with the convicts to administer the lands.
'Just a governance, just a statute, just a reasonable Act' –
But the pear don't care for reasonable – the pear just takes the tract.

Each regulation clones itself and pads along the ground,
Each Act of Parliament, like pear-seed, spreads without a sound.
The minister begets the board, the board begets the clerk,
And the pear has filled the paddock long before you've marked the mark.

Where once a man stood answerable to twelve good men and true,
Now he stands before a tribunal that Parliament pushed through.
No jury of his neighbours, no presumption of his right –
Just a delegated officer beneath fluorescent light.



The Charter said 'habeas corpus' – bring the body, show the cause,
But the pear-pad's grown so thickly now it's smothered ancient laws.
They call it regulation, call it safety, call it health,
But it's the King in different clothing redistributing wealth.



The selector swung his mattock till his shoulders burned and ached,
But for every pad he severed, twenty more just woke and waked.
You can challenge legislation till your barrister's gone grey –
But the piece that hits the ground, old son, just finds another way.

It has spines for how you graze here, spines for where you choose to roam,
Spines for how you educate your children in your home.
Spines for what you say aloud and spines for what you think,
Spines for every liberty you're standing on the brink.



The Natural Law Tribunal was the meadow and the Thames,
Where no decree of Parliament could nullify your claims.
Where the Law was not invented by the powerful and the pen,
But was 'discovered' in the nature of the dignity of men.

That you own yourself completely – bone and sinew, thought and breath,
That no authority can bind you without judgment, without test.
That to take a man's possessions or to silence what he'd say
Requires twelve of his own countrymen to lawfully weigh.



They brought a moth to kill the pear – a reckoning overdue,
A taste of natural consequence before the last stock flew.
But who will bring the reckoning for the Acts piled on the Acts,
For the courts that answer statutes now instead of natural facts?

The barons brought their reckoning to the meadow, sword in hand,
They said: 'you'll rule by ancient right or you'll not rule this land.'
And the King who faced them shaking signed the vellum in the reeds –
For even kings must yield at last to what plain justice needs.



So here's to 1215, to Runnymede's wet grass,
To the principle that power is a thing that ought to pass
Through the hands of lawful judgment, of your neighbours, of your peers –
Not the hands of men in offices who've multiplied for years.

And here's to 1788, to the cutting in the hold,
And to 1901, when the Parliament was scrolled –
Three moments in a longer story, prickled, padded, dense,
Of a people slowly fenced away from their own common sense.



For the pear don't care what Parliament says is right or fair,
It don't respect your boundaries – it just puts more pear there.
And the men who rule by statute while the Charter gathers dust
Are simply pear-pads spreading green across a broken trust.



*What Runnymede established wasn't given – it was won.
What the Fleet and Federation brought is still not fully done.
And the paddock won't be open again, the grass won't have its say,
Till we find the ancient boundary – and we plant ourselves there. Today.*