OPEN FOUNDATION COURSE AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

Room V102 Tuesday 1.00 p.m. to 3.00 p.m. 6th September 1988

Oral History Research Paper

Summary of taped interview.

Coalmining, Rothbury and Miners' Federation.

Lucyna MANNING

Mr. Francis Joseph Manning was born on the 9th March 1902 in Innes, County Clare, Ireland. He is the fourth eldest of a family of six children, all boys, with the exception of the eldest, his sister. Mr. Manning's father emigrated to Australia two years before he sent for his wife and children in order to find employment and set up a home for them. His father was a tailor by trade back home in Ireland, but only worked in that trade for a short period at Kurri Co-operative Store before going into the mining industry. Mr. Manning settled into the mining community of Weston in 1912.

Frank attended Abermain Convent School until the age of 14 years at which time he left school and obtained employment as a "pit top boy" at Hebburn No.1. Colliery. He commenced on the 11th April 1916 and was eventually retrenched in 1958, when the Hebburn Colliery closed operations.

Throughout the 42 years in the mines, he recalls many good times and some bad times. Strikes and stoppages were a way of life over the years. Mr. Manning conditions were appalling when compared to the mechanisation of mining today. "It was hard work", he said, but "we were young and vigorous and the only way to get to the coal was by pick and shovel".

Mr. Manning was one of 12,000 miners who picketed Rothbury in 1929 as a protest against the use of "scab" labour by the then Bavin Government. He said the miners had formed Lodges, to whom they paid a "stump" (union dues) for the marginal benefits they had won over the years and to use "scab" labour created "hostility for defying the union rules".

Mr. Manning said he was shocked at the violence that ensued at Rothbury on the day Norman Brown was shot and killed by the police. The Lockout did continue for another five months after that incident, with continuous negotiations in an effort to arrive at some resolution. However, he said "all things come to an end...the depression was setting in" and they returned to work defeated but not "demoralised"...

In the early 1940s, Mr. Manning was elected President of the Hebburn No.1. Lodge, which position he held for some 14 years years, unopposed, till Hebburn coal "ran out". He obtained a position as a Waterfront Watchman. Mr. Manning stated that it was a "strange transition" but "(he) carried with (him) the experience of the mines" and was eventually made a Delegate of the Waterfront Watchman's Union and continued in this capacity till illness forced his retirement three years ago at the age of 82.

OPEN FOUNDATION COURSE AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

ROOM V102

1.00 p.m. to 3.00 p.m. Tuesday

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH PAPER

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH MR. FRANCIS JOSEPH MANNING ON 28.8.88 at MEREWETHER.

SUBJECT: COALMINING, ROTHBURY.

Interviewer: Lucyna Manning

Lucyna Manning: What was your name? Frank Manning: Francis Joseph Manning. Lucyna Manning: When were you born? Frank Manning: 1902. March 9th 1902. Lucyna Manning: Where were you born? Frank Manning: Innes, County Clare, Ireland. Lucyna Manning: When did your family come to Australia? Frank Manning: 1912. Lucyna Manning: Where did you live when you first came here? Frank Manning: We lived in the mining town of Weston. Lucyna Manning: Did you have any brothers & sisters? Frank Manning: Yes, I had four brothers and one sister. Sister was the oldest. Lucyna Manning: Where did you go to school? Frank Manning: Abermain Convent School. Lucyna Manning: You were Catholics? Frank Manning: Catholic school, yes. Lucyna Manning: At what age did you leave school? Frank Manning: When I was 14. How long between the time you left school did you find Lucyna Manning: employment? Frank Manning: I got a job straight away. Lucyna Manning: How did that come about? Frank Manning: In them days, boys, they employed a lot of boys, trapping and all that and I got a job as a trapper. When did you start? Lucyna Manning: In April 11th 1916. Frank Manning: Which mine? IM: Hebburn No.1. in the Maitland field. FM: LM: At what age did you marry? (Thinking) About 24 I think. FM: Did you move into your own home straightaway? IM: FM: Not straight away. We lived with the wife's mother & my brothers helped me to build my own home next to my mother's in Weston. Did you borrow money to build? IM: I borrowed 400 pounds off a solicitor in Cessnock. FM: We built the home ourselves. From 1916 to 1929 were there many strikes? LM: On yes, there was a strike. I can't remember what it was FM: for, but there were stoppages in the mines, individual

stoppages and district wide strikes. Yes quite a lot of trouble because in the mines it was a contract system

and it was very hard work.

Lucyna Manning: Frank Manning:

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What were the strikes always over? Working conditions.

How many days would you say you would have lost over a a year?

One year we lost...one strike was 10 months, the afternoon shift strike. I wasn't working then, of course. They wanted to do away with the afternoon shift. I started in 1916 and in 1917 and the afternoon shift was abolished and I was cavelled out. There was quite a lot of strikes. The nature of the work was hard, it was a contract system. The miners and the wheelers. If anything got in their way of earning money, well, they only got paid for what they filled and if anything got in their way they would want compensation. The bosses refused then there would be trouble.

So, what transpired just before March 1929? What was happening?

Well, 1929 was the Lockout. We were working pretty well and the boss wanted us to accept, I think it was 121% or 15% reduction in wages and conditions. We refused, we said no, we don't want.... They locked us out. We all ...in the Northern district of the Federation. Newcastle Maitland. We got our notice of dismissal. We were out 13 months. We were supported by the other miners who were working in the south and the west and in Queensland by a levy. Once a fortnight we got a hand-out from the Lodge Of course, in the local town, they set up a committee, relief committee, in case anyone was in dire need. If a woman was going to have a baby then we'd go and visit her and get the baby clothes and all that sort of thing. When it started, did you think it would go for so long? No. we didn't know. We just said we don't want a reduction in wages to that amount. So they locked us out. It was a Lockout.

How did you repay your mortgage during that time?

I didn't pay it at all. Didn't have no money to pay.

They didn't press you did they?

No, they didn't press me. You didn't have the money and they wouldn't dare to put you out of the house because the house would then be declared black.

What does that mean?

That would mean that no one would go live in the house. In fact, they refused to leave it & the house would be declared black and it would deteriorate, fall to pieces. That actually happened. In Weston. Man was put out of his house. The house went bit by bit. The windows and the doors and everything. They were very strong against eviction. I was in many eviction.....fights.. the agent would come along and stand up and call out and we'd all

Frank Manning:

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shout him down and he'd go away.

What was the feeling of the other members of the community that weren't miners?

Oh well..they knew the situation. They were a part of the mining industry.....they knew that we were locked out and it wasn't our fault.

What did you do to pass the time?

Well, them days there was no radio, we had strike dances. We called them. You'd run a dance, a concert with local artists. We'd go around to some other town and look for artists. I'd done myself, I'd go to East Maitland and got a man who was a pretty good artist. In fact the Stationmaster at East Maitland, he came in and performed for us. We'd get artists from the town, you see. Very good singers. Beautiful voices. And of course them days the culture in the towns was very good. Kurri, mining town next door to where I lived, they had a male voice choir. They had an orchestra. They had a Pipe Band. They had a brass band. Weston had a male voice choir, the place where I lived and a brass band. In Abermain they had a brass band. Abermain run an Eisteddford for 70 years in fact it's still being run, but they run it in Cessnock now. Originally formed in Abermain. The people put the time in in that way. And of course, they visited homes and you would talk, nothing to interrupt you, you know with television, didn't exist, they didn't know......

.... How far away from Rothbury where you were living? I think it was about 20 mile.I think..I'm not too sure but I think it was.

When you heard Rothbury was to be re-opened ..?

Well, when we heard it was to be re-opened by scab labour. That was the intention..that was to demoralise and try to defeat the miners. We decided to protest.

Did you go as a group?

Oh yes, groups, yes.

What transport, did you walk?

Oh, we walked, them days the transport was very limited, not like today..motor cars and that sort of thing.

And you were led by a band?

Yes.

Why were you led by a band?

Well (laughs) you march better with a band. A band was part of the Miner's Lodge, you know. It give them a bit of pip I suppose.

Lucyna Manning: Frank Manning:

Why do you think the Government made this move?
Well, to defeat the miners, the Nationalist Government
as they called it them days. They call them Liberals now
but them days they called them Nationalists and they
were out to defeat the miners. To break the miners
spirit. They thought they'd introduce scab labour as I
call it, into the mine, hoping that they would start
you know, they'd start the other mines, but they failed.
Was this a general feeling by everybody in the community
then?

Oh yes, yes, oh yes there was hostility against....scabs
..I went to other mines, small little mines, the airfield
where they had free labour and we demonstrated and all
that. Oh yes it was hostility against defying the union
What was the atmosphere as you were marching that day?
Oooh, you were just marching you know...free and easy.
Never intended to...any trouble...we didn't expect any
trouble.

What was the picketers attitude?

Oh..just..make their presence felt and to say we're here to protest against scab labour in Rothbury Mine. Was Violence anticipated on the miner's part?

No...no we didn't anticipate violence. we just didn't... So when you got there then what happened?

The place was surrounded by police, I don't know how many was there but there were police armed, one side of the fence and we were on the other.

How did the miners retaliate?

Well, they went to the fence and they were shouting out and all that sort of thing and police drew their guns and they shot. They shot one man, Norman Brown and wounded another, from Kurri, I forget his name now. There might have been more for all we know but of course they kept quiet you see because they didn't want anyone to know Norman Brown was killed.

How long did it go for?

Ooh a couple of hours I suppose.

Were the scabs locals?

No I don't think so. Very hard....no they weren't local. We didn't know of any scabs locally, not from our Lodge. the men were pretty....there may have been some who didn't work in the mine, who lived in the town but we didn't know.

Any idea of the numbers of scabs?

Oh no,,, I believe there were a good few in Rothbury.

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The police, were they locals?

We say...(Laughs) that they weren't locals. The local police never left the town..they were brought from other of places.

Why did you eventually give in?

Well, 13 months I suppose, we were defeated. All things come to an end. Of course the depression was setting in them days you see, that made it worse.

How did the Miners Federation feel about giving after such a long struggle?

Well, they went to a vote and it was...there was going

to be a compromise and the men refused the compromise at first, brought out by the leaders and they rejected it.

Then the next time it came up, of course, they accepted it. We went back to work as a united body, formed our Lodge, paid our union dues and secretary, treasurer were elected and a committee and we carried on as if we'd never been out on strike. It didn't demoralise us.

Were the miners dispirited as they went back?

No, I don't think so. I think they realised...they held out for a long time.

What about the mines in the rest of the State? Did they have any animosity towards paying the levy to support you? No, no, Oh no. That was a must in the mines. The levy was put on and they knew what they were paying for. Of course, it didn't interfere with their wages but when they defeated us, they reduced their wages. Yes they paid a levy. I think it was 12½% or 15%, I km, not too sure now. The conditions before the lockout to after the lockout did they change in any way?

No, just only the wages were reduced, but we went back into the mine with the same spirit of fighting for our rights and negotiating with the bosses and justice.... What sort of conditions did you work in?

Well, the work varied in different mines and of course the

mine was a tunnel, big tunnel or a shaft, might be a thousand foot shaft. Where I worked it was a tunnel. And eh, it was north, south, east and west, took you an hour and a half to walk into some places. And you went up hill and down dale as you got down too steep and then you went up, then you went down. It was very hard work. Mining, the wheeling especially mining. They pulled 16 or 17 tons with pick and shovel. They had to bore the holes in the coal, to blast the coal down. Then they had to protect themselves from the bad conditions. The roof, so it was non stop.

Lucyna Manning: Frank Manning:

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Was water a problem?

Oh yes, there was water. In some places the water was a problem. You'd be workin' and you'd bilge the water They they used to have, what they call water bailers. They'd see the place was dry. Then when you were shovellin' with the shovel you'd probably put a lot of water into the skip. But water was a problem. Of course, a big problem in the mines. Water comes from... was always water in the mines. Some mines worse than others.

How would you get it out of the skip?

It got mixed with the coal. But when you went to bail a place dry you what you call a water tub. Sealed, it had a plug in it and you filled it up, took it out and pulled the plug out and let the water out. There was a special skip built to hold the water.

What were the working conditions?

We as I said mining was hard work. Not because I worked in the mines but I think there are very few jobs, if any, that is as hard as mining in the old fashioned way of getting coal with pick and shovel. You had to fill 16 tons or 17 tons and you got paid by weight. If you didn't fill 16 ton or 14 ton. You only got paid for that. You had to blast that down from the face, exploded, which you pay for, by the way, out of his pay. Costs, it was called, you had to pay for it. So the harder the place, the more powder he used and the less money you made. It was very arduous work indeed. The wheeling was also hard work but was done mostly by young, about 18 or 19 and they were young and vigorous but still they worked hard. But mining had men of all ages, you see, no retiring age in the mines then, the men just worked on till they couldn't work any more. I may be biased but I would say that, looking back, mining was a challenge. Today it's mechanised, the machine does the work, the miner. The wheeler used to wheel, two pair of miners, that'd be four miners and they worked in different places and he'd fill four skips at a time. One two and another two. Pull skips out to the flat ...he might have a long distance to go..he might have a short distance to go. Then he would come back with another two. We just kept busy....but they were young and pretty active, you know, that sort of thing. The two jobs in the mine, mining and wheeling was good. The day work labour was alright, labourers in the mine that was alright.

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Lucyna Manning:

Frank Manning:

Accidents?

Oh yes, there were accidents. People killed, I forget
I often try to remember them, I think I can remember
six killed before I started and killed after. Of course,
there was the usual accidents. My finger is shortened
now (held up finger cut off at the second joint) because

When did you lose that?

that was an accident.

When I was a boy.

What happened?

I got it jammed betteen the buffers of two skips.

Did you get compensated for that?

No, I was seen ... miner's accident.

Miner's Accident Relief Fund. There was no compensation then..I think the compensation act came in in 1917, I'm not too sure about that. It was the Miner's

Accident Relief Fund..very little. but of course different wage conditions them days. Many accidents after that

Anything serious?

No, nothing serious, back injury, coal on the head.

Have you had any regrets about mining?

No, I always had special.....close knit people, stood by you. You could speak out. Voice your opinion. You couldn't be victimised. They had what you call seniority. Seniority. If the boss didn't like you he couldn't get rid of you....(laughs)...goes by seniority. An independence to speak. Not that you abused it but...

that was a great thing seniority. Everyone.

Did you have political affiliations while you were..?

Oh yes, there were affiliations to the Labor Party most of the time. Yes, the Labor Party. Most of the people in the mines were Labor. In the depression years, the Militants came in, the Communist Party. Most of the people, I think they voted Labor. Members of Parliament for the localities of Labor. We got on alright with them

no discrimination, you had your ideas. You became President of Hebburn Lodge?

I became President of Hebburn Lodge about 1942 I think.

I won it by four votes, defeated the President by 4 votes and then years after he stood against me again and I beat him by 2 to 1.

How long were you President?

From 1942 to 1958 when the mine closed down, the mine finished. I was unopposed for all those years.

When did you finally retire from mining?

When the mine closed down in '58, a lot of mines were closing down. At Hebburn No.1. we got our notice, the mine was closing and I was out of work and eventually I got a job as a Waterfront Watchman which was a strange transition but I carried with me the experience of the

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mines and eventually I was made a Delegate and Delegate there for some time.

You didn't have any regrets at all? Would you have changed anything about mining now that you know? (Laughs) I think I'd put the men back on the pick and shovel. I sit and think now and it was laborious work, it was, back-breaking. Of course, we were young and vigorous and probably got used to it. There's no doubt it was hard work.

Did you feel exploited then? Or is that only in hindsight you felt exploited by the proprietors?

Well, they didn't have any mechanisation in them days see so that was the method of getting coal out of the place. But, the miners stood up for their rights and they had stoppages, if anything happened they wouldn't go down the pit, they'd go home and they were very independent.

What was the "stump"?

The stump was the union dues. Where the name come from I don't know. Once a fortnight we paid, we paid it on a Friday when we got our pay, we lined up, queued up, to pay our stump or our union dues. The Lodge Secretary and the Lodge Treasurer, took your money and gave you a receipt. That was a must. You couldn't miss...if you missed two pays and didn't pay, your lamp would be stopped and you weren't allowed to go down the mine Very strict. they were.

What would happen if youdidn't pay?

Well, you'd be told to go home. In fact I had occasion as President of the Lodge to tell a man to go home. I'd warned him the day before to bring...if he didn't pay the stump. I said if you don't bring your stump tomorrow. So he came the next day and sittin' there and the news got 'round and the whistle went to go down the pit and I walked over to him and I said "did you b ring your money to pay your union dues?" He hung his head and he said "No". "Pick up your lamp" I said, "your water bottle and crib and go home". He did that. All the men were sitting around in complete silence. Watched him go, watched him put his lamp, and out of the pit. Then it wasn't a nice thing to do, but I had to do it because it was important. That was the way it was done.

OPEN FOUNDATION COURSE
AUSTRALIAN HISTORY
ROOM V102
Tuesday 1.00 p.m. to 3.00 p.m.

Lucyna MANNING

6 September 1988

Term 3 RESEARCH PAPER

PAPER: Coalmining, Rothbury & Miners' Federation.

Throughout its long and turbulent history, the coal industry has been marked by disputes, disasters and a continuous struggle between mine workers and mine owners for better wages and conditions. By the mid 1920s, the falling demand for Australian coal led to a clash between the mine owners and the Miners' Federation as to who should bear the burden of the reduction in price. This clash culminated in the closure, by the Northern Collieries Association, of most of the collieries in the Northern district from March 1929 to May 1930. In the ninth month of the Lockout, Premier Bavin announced his Government would re-open Rothbury Colliery with nonunion labour. This decision led to a mass picketing of the mine, which in turn led to violent conflict between the police and the picketers. However, despite the long and bitter struggle, the miners capitulated under pressure from the Government and mine owners. With the onset of deep economic depression and the growth of real poverty, the workers were forced back on reduced contract and other pay rates. Nonetheless, the Miners' Federation as a union organisation, laid the foundation for the strong Federation it is today.

The output for coal during World War 1 had shown stagnation, but new markets arose to fill the gap. B.H.P. opened production in 1918 and brought with it new usages for coal.(1) This led to a general boost in the demand for coal workers as well as a renewal of the exporting of coal. However, in the years immediately after World War 1, a combination of over-capacity and higher productivity, produced a glut of cheap European steel which seriously threatened the infant heavy industries. By 1922, the number of workers at B.H.P. were slashed from 5500 to 1500/1800. B.H.P. gave as one of its reasons, the high price of coal. (2)

The temporary revival of exporting coal in 1919, sent the figures to above 10,000,000 tons. However, it also sent the number of coal workers up considerably. Whilst renewed export began to taper off, the output and the numbers employed continued to rise till 1924 and 1925. (3) With the rising numbers of workers, there was an accentuation of intermittency of employment. By 1928, the average number of days worked by mineworkers had fallen from 200 in 1922 (and 274 in earlier years) to 168 days. (4) Accordingly the Davidson Royal Commission was appointed to inquire into the condition of the coal industry.

⁽¹⁾ M.H. Ellis A Saga of Coal Sydney, 1969 P 191

⁽²⁾ J.C. Docherty <u>Newcastle</u>, <u>The Making of an Australian City</u> Sydney, 1969 P39

⁽³⁾ Ellis Saga P191

⁽⁴⁾ E.Ross A History of the Miners' Federation of Australia Sydney, 1970 P326

The reduced Australian demand for coal was thought to be due to the development of their own resources by other States; extended use of alternative sources of power and falls due to the downturn in the business cycle. The fall in the export trade was attributable to the relatively high price of Australian coal. (5) The Davidson Royal Commission held that on the basis of world prices, the price of Australian coal should have been 19/4 whereas it was not less than 26/1. (6)

Foreign coal was being brought in via South Australia in 1927-8 and sold at lower prices than the Australian product. The Commonwealth and State Governments proposed that everybody concerned should make sacrifices to secure price reduction. It was proposed that the mine owners should give up 1s. per ton of their profit; freight on coal should be reduced by 2s. per ton on the railways and employees should accept a $12\frac{1}{2}\%$ reduction in wages. These reductions were to be taken off the price of coal in an effort to stimulate the market. (7)

The Miners' Federation rejected the proposal for a 12½% wage reduction for its members and in fact opposed any reduction whatsoever, but the employer's aims had the support of both the Commonwealth and State Governments. Upon rejection of the proposal, the Northern proprietors gave their employees 14 days' notice, stating that the mines would not re-open till the miners accepted this reduction. The union felt that the members had earned the little they had gained over the years and that any drop in wages could only lead to a further decline in their already meagre standard of living. (8)

Thus in March 1929, began the longest and most devastating stoppage in the history of the industry. Some 12,000 mine workers were involved and its effects overflowed into every section of the community. Traditionally the Miners' Federation funded relief to mine workers by imposing a levy on its members. Intermittency had made the financing of this relief an increasing problem and funds were severely depleted by 1929. (9) However, a committee recommendation for the striking of a 12½% levy on working members, led to the relief pay of 8/- for a single man, 15/- for a married man and 3/- for each child to help sustain the locked out miners.(10) Mr. Frank Manning stated that had it not been for these relief payments, the coalminers and their families could not have survived the long and arduous months of negotiations for a resolution. (11)

⁽⁵⁾ R. Gollan The Coalminers of New South Wales Melbourne, 1963 P187

⁽⁶⁾ E. Ross History P326

⁽⁷⁾ Ellis <u>Saga</u> P194

⁽⁸⁾ Parkes et al Mines, Wines and People Newcastle, 1979 P196

⁽⁹⁾ Gollan <u>Coalminers</u> P134

⁽¹⁰⁾Ross <u>History</u> P337

⁽¹¹⁾ Interview Francis Manning 28.8.88

In the ninth month of the Lockout, it was announced by Premier Bavin, that Rothbury Colliery would be re-opened and worked by 350 non-union members. Mr. Manning stated it was the concensus of opinion at that time, that this was designed to "break the back of the Union".(12) The Miners' Federation had mass meetings and it was decided to picket Rothbury as a protest.(13)

Mr. Frank Manning was 27 years old at the time of the Lockout and was one of the 12,000 picketers. Mr.Manning's recollection of the Rothbury incident was "an experience (he) will never forget". He recalls feeling both confused and excited by the thousands of miners who had assembled for the protest demonstration. Despite the seriousness of the situation, he remembers the strong feeling of camaraderie and unity as the mass picketers, led by the Kurri Miner's Pipe Band, marched into Rothbury. Mr. Manning remembers the police were armed with guns and battons and states the police initiated the violence which sent men running into the bushes to escape being injured. Norman Brown, he said, was shot and killed in the fracas.(14) It was reported on the front page of the "Daily Telegraph Pictorial", that Norman Brown, 29 years, was killed by a ricochet bullet fired by police.(15)

However, despite the many hardships, the miners in the Northern coalfields resisted the relentless pressure from the mine proprietors and the Government for 15 months. Real poverty was prevalent as the miners and their families tried to eke out an existence on the low lockout pay. With the gathering economic crisis, the miner's resistance was eventually broken and they returned to work and reluctantly accepted the 12½% wage reduction. Nonetheless, the Miners' Federation, as a union body, were the pioneers who took the first difficult steps that inspired the slogan at the inception of district union organisation in 1860: "United We Stand, Divided We Fall". (16)

(13) E. Ross History P340

(14) Interview Francis Manning 28.8.88

(16) E. Ross <u>History</u> Foreward

⁽¹²⁾ Interview Francis Manning 28.8.88

⁽¹⁵⁾ Daily Telegraph Pictorial, Sydney, Tuesday December 17, 1929, Front Page

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Interview:

Mr. Francis Manning 28 August 1988 at Merewether.

UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE OPEN FOUNDATION COURSE

1988

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| permission to Lucyna Manning |
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| Signed If manual |
| Date 28.8.88 |
| Interviewer LucyNA MANNING |

Please return the form below together with payment to Community Programmes as soon as possible and certainly by November 7th.

| | END OF O.F.C. B.B.Q. | November 9, 1988 5.30 pm 'til Student Union Courtyard | |
|-----------------|--|---|------|
| Name | LUCYNA MANN | INC- | |
| Address | 31 CAMBRIDGE | DR. GARDEN SUBURB | 1288 |
| Telephone | 548449 | 73011-1 | |
| Please reserv | ve a place for me and gues | sts at the Barbie. | |
| The fee of \$ _ | (\$7 per person) is enclosed. | | |
| MAKE CHEQU | ES PAYABLE TO 'UNIVERSITY OF NEWC | ASTLE' | |
| RETURN TO | The Secretary, Department of Community P University of Newcastle. 23 | | |