

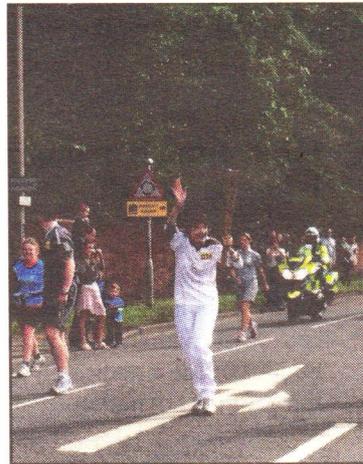
Torch bearer for Bangkok

DENISE Gray gave an excited kick and a wiggle as she set off to run 300m carrying the Olympic Flame through Reading. Denise, 53, who worships at St James, Finchampstead, was nominated for the work she does raising money each year to give children with HIV/AIDS the chance of a beach holiday in Bangkok.

She does the work through the Mercy Centre, an organisation that works to protect orphans and street children and improve family welfare. Her various fundraisers take place at the St James Family Centre.

She said she could not explain the experience of running with the Olympic Flame. "To say it was exhilarating doesn't do it justice. When I first met up with the other torch bearers I felt nervous, which is not like me at all. There was someone there who had undergone a lung transplant, someone who had been in a coma from a car accident and others from different causes," said Denise, who works as a member of the cabin crew on British Airways flights.

"It makes you feel really humble but you also feel like a celebrity. People want to take photos of you, photos with you and photos with their babies.



They are handing you their babies and you are trying to juggle them with holding the torch. I started running with a kick and a wiggle and the adrenalin took over."

When the nomination was made Denise was about to fly to Mumbai to help at an orphanage. The form, which was filled in by a former colleague, stated: "Denise does this in her own time and bears the costs herself. Denise has always been a special person, someone who rises above situations and does really good things. She brings a smile and positivity to everyone who meets her. I can think of no one who deserves this more, oh and by the way she loves to run."