Chevron is a form of three-dimensional architectural ornament consisting of zigzags formed by a roll or rolls. The term ‘zigzag’ is itself reserved for the essentially two-dimensional form without rolls.

Following heraldic usage, a single unit should be ‘one chevron’, and the plural ‘chevrons’. Various collective nouns have been used in the past to refer to chevron ornament: ‘strand’, ‘band’, ‘set’ and ‘row’ of chevrons being the commonest. The first two fail to convey the idea of separate, repeated units, and ‘set’ has no connotation of linearity. ‘Row’ therefore seems the best choice, since it is generally used to describe a line of similar objects, e.g. teeth, pearls, cinema seats.

Part 1: The Grammar of Chevron Description

Position and Direction

Chevron ornament is most commonly found decorating the orders of an arch. The difficulties experienced in describing it both adequately and systematically arise from the number of different forms it can take. It may be found on the face, the soffit or the edge of an order and the chevrons themselves can point in various directions with respect to the surface on which they are carved. Kintbury, for example, has face chevrons projecting from the face (pl.1, second order), while Chichester has face chevrons carved in the plane of the face (pl.2, first & third orders). The same variety is found in soffit chevrons. Compare, for example, Crowland (pl.3) and Gloucester (pl.4). Edge chevrons are generally carved flat on the plane of a chamfered edge, as at Kilham (pl.5, second, fourth & fifth orders), and it is convenient to reserve the term ‘edge chevron’ for this form. The much rarer type found at Glastonbury (pl.6), where the chevrons project from the edge at an angle, should be described as ‘projecting edge chevron’.

When describing chevron, therefore, account must be taken both of their position (on face, soffit, or edge) and their direction relative to the surface on which they are carved. The three categories to describe direction are as follows:

Lateral chevrons, meaning that the chevrons are carved parallel to the surface of the stone — i.e. parallel to the face of an order if they are on the face, or parallel to the soffit if they are on the soffit. Frontal chevrons, meaning that the chevrons are carved to project at right angles from the surface of the stone — i.e. at right angles to the face if they are on the face, or at right angles to the soffit if they are on the soffit. Angled chevrons, meaning that the chevrons are carved to project from the surface at less than a right angle — i.e. somewhere between lateral and frontal.

(There is also a variety called directional chevron, which consists of separate units of chevron following the contour of an arch, like nested Vs. This is described in Part IV.)
Setting aside angled chevrons for the moment, there are thus four standard terms used to describe chevron:

Lateral on the face. The tribune arches at Norwich (pl.7) would be described as having one row of lateral chevrons on the face.

Lateral on the soffit. The Gloucester nave arcade (pl.4) has one row of lateral chevrons on the soffit.

Frontal to the face. The Barfreston (pl.8) and Brinkburn (pl.9) examples each have three rows of chevron frontal to the face of the second order.

Frontal to the soffit. The crossing arch at Crowland (pl.3) has four rows of chevron frontal to the soffit, two on either side of a plain soffit roll (see below under stepped chevron for a full description).

The example of Gloucester (pl.4) highlights a problem which must be faced. In order to carve chevron it is usually necessary for the sculptor to work both the face and the soffit of each voussoir. Thus pl.4 could also be described as one row of chevron frontal to the face. To make this clear, consider Barfreston (pl.8), where the same type of chevron, repeated in three rows on the face of an arch, must be described as three rows of chevron frontal to the face. How is one to decide which description to use?

The problem only arises when there is a single row of chevron cut into the arris between face and soffit. In such cases it is best treated as lateral chevron: lateral to the soffit at Gloucester (pl.4); or lateral to the face at Cholsey (pl.10) Describing it as lateral chevron will make it easier in cases where the V-shaped fields between the points are decorated.

**Carving Chevron Voussoirs**

A sculptor faced with the task of carving an order of lateral face chevron will normally (but not always) carve one chevron on each voussoir. There are two ways of doing this: with the point of each unit facing out, towards the broad end of the voussoir; or with the point facing inwards, towards the narrow end. Compare, for example, loose sculpture from Bosham, pl.11, with the first order at Sutton Courtenay, pl.12. Noting the way individual units of chevron are carved can be a useful pointer towards workshop connections between monuments. We suggest the terms centrifugal, for voussoirs carved with the chevrons pointing outwards like Bosham, and centripetal for the Sutton Courtenay type, by analogy with the use of these terms in describing rose windows.
Moulding Profiles

Chevron ornament is often composed of a sequence of roll- and hollow-mouldings. The description should include this information, the rows being described in the form two rows of lateral chevrons, roll/hollow, on the face (Hatford, pl.13). It is not necessary to give this information if all the profiles are similar rolls, but where thick and thin rolls alternate, this fact should also be recorded.

Stepped Chevron

Examples are Iffley, W doorway, first order: four rows of lateral chevrons, stepped, on the face (pl.14); and Crowland (pl.3), which can now be more fully described: four rows of chevron frontal to the soffit, two stepped rows on either side of a central soffit roll.

Point-to-point, Back-to-back

Where lateral face and soffit chevrons are carved on the same order with their points meeting, the result is point-to-point (Elkstone, pl.15). Where frontal face and soffit chevrons are carved symmetrically on the same order, the result is back-to-back (East Lavant, Sussex, pl.16).

Angled Chevrons, Gaping Chevron
Angled chevrons can occur on the face, soffit or edge of an order. Descriptions of the common types of angled chevron found on face and soffit are fairly straightforward. For edge chevron, remember that the common type shown in pl.5 (second, fourth & fifth orders) is called edge chevron, and reserve the term projecting edge chevron for chevron projecting from the edge, as at Glastonbury (pl.6), which would be described as follows: roll, hollow, half-roll on the face, one row of projecting chevrons on each edge, two soffit rolls separated by a wedge.

The third order of Bristol Gatehouse (pl.17) provides an example of a rare type of chevron, carved frontal to the face, consisting of two rows angled away from one another. The resemblance to a row of open mouths led to the suggestion that this should be called gaping chevron, in this case, one row of gaping chevron, frontal to the face. Since this is repeated symmetrically on the soffit we have: third order, gaping chevron, back-to-back with an edge roll.

**Vault Ribs**

Vault ribs can usually be described in the same way as other arches. Iffley (pl.18), for example, has two rows of irregular lateral chevrons, stepped, on either side of the soffit, with a row of irregular lozenges along the centre. It is sometimes difficult to decide whether the carving is on the face or the soffit of a rib, but the problem can usually be resolved by looking at the springing rather than the apex of the vault.

**Curved Orders**

With orders which are curved in section, like the quadrant section orders at Durham (pls. 19 & 20), the distinction between face and soffit does not apply. Descriptions would be of the form: fifth order, curved section, six rows of lateral chevron alternating roll, hollow.

**Part 2: The Treatment of the Edge of an Order**

Special treatment is sometimes given to edges. Four types are described here:

The inner edge of lateral face chevron may be undercut to leave a serrated edge, as at Cholsey (pl.10). Wedges may be carved between the points at the inner edge of lateral face chevron, producing cogwheel edge, as at Rochester (pl.21). An edge roll may be carved, especially with point-to-point or back-to-back chevron. An ornamental edge may be carved, for example repeated motifs may occur on the edge between the points of point-to-point chevron as at Hereford (pl.22, third order) where there are bosses between the points.

**Part 3: Variations of Chevron Ornament**

**Hyphenated Chevrons**
These are chevrons separated by straight sections, as in the Victorian example at Kintbury (pl.23).

**Syncopated Chevrons**

When two rows of hyphenated chevrons are juxtaposed on a face or soffit so that the points of one row are directed towards the hyphens of the other, they are described as syncopated. At Lincoln (pl.24, third order) we have: two rows of lateral hyphenated chevrons, syncopated on the face, similar on the soffit, meeting hyphen-to-hyphen.

**Limping Chevrons**

Related to hyphenated chevrons is a variety in which regular chevrons alternate with shallower ones in the same row. These are called limping chevrons, and an example is found at Garway (pl.25, second order): two rows of limping chevrons point-to-point with one row of projecting edge chevrons between.

**Hyphenated Lozenges**

Lozenges can be hyphenated in much the same way as chevrons. The soffits of the diagonal vault ribs in Hereford retrochoir provide an example (pl.26), and on the west facade of Rochester (pl.27) we find a stringcourse of hyphenated lozenges with corbels gripping the hyphens. Care should be taken to distinguish between a row of hyphenated lozenges, which has single hyphens, and two rows of hyphenated chevrons arranged hyphen-to-hyphen (as at Walsoken, pl.28).

**Part 4: Directional Chevron**

The basic form is of chevron units carved lateral to a face or soffit so as to form nested V-shapes rather than a zigzag line. All the Vs might point the same way, but usually there is a change of direction at the top of the arch, as on the chancel arch at Amberley (pl.29): second order, directional face chevron pointing to apex of arch, alternating roll/hollow.
A variation occurs when each chevron is carved half on the face and half on the soffit, with the points running over the arris of the order, see Steyning (pl.30). This variety might conveniently be called straddling directional chevron. See also Part 5 for the free-standing form.

**Part 5: Free-standing Chevrons and Lozenges**

A late form of chevron is that in which the solid interior of the triangle is cut out, the roll only remaining. This is known as free-standing chevron. There is also a free-standing form of straddling directional chevron where the Vs occupy both face and soffit of an order, straddling an edge roll. Both of these free-standing forms occur on the W doorway of Worksop Priory (pl.31): forth order, free-standing chevrons point-to-point over edge roll with annulets at the points; third order, free-standing straddling directional chevron pointing to springing of arch, over edge roll.

A rare form of free-standing straddling directional chevron has the chevrons pointing in alternate directions. Glastonbury Lady Chapel, exterior south wall (pl.32), has this form combined with free-standing hyphenated lozenges: free-standing hyphenated lozenges running through free-standing straddling directional chevron (alternate directions).