Här är en excerpt från ett brev som Maxwell skrev till den matematikern Tait den 7 november, 1870. Det förklarar varifrån kommer termen 'curl'.

'Here are some rough-hewn names. Will you, like a good Divinity, shape their ends properly so as to make them stick ? ....

The vector part $[\boldsymbol{\nabla} \times \boldsymbol{F}]$ I would call the twist of the function. Here the word twist has nothing to do with a screw or helix. The word *turn* .... would be better than twist, for twist suggests a screw. Twirl is free from the screw motion and is sufficiently racy. Perhaps it is too dynamical for pure mathematicians, so for Cayley's sake I might say Curl (after the fashion of Scroll).'