Many observations and analyses of solar and geophysical phenomena were necessary to prepare the stage for the first space weather prediction by William Ellis in the year 1879. Following this, slow progress was made in linking solar events to their terrestrial counterparts. The twin technologies of telegraphy and radio provided the impetus for forecast improvement. We briefly summarise some key events during the 19th and first part of the 20th centuries that we believe are relevant in the early history of space weather forecasting.